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**LOST FOR GOLD.**

**VOL. III.**



# LOST FOR GOLD.

BY

KATHARINE KING,

AUTHOR OF

“THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.”

“There is thy gold—worse poison to men's minds,  
Doing more murders in this loathsome world  
Than these poor compounds that thou mayst not sell.  
I sell thee poison—thou hast sold me none.”

*Romeo and Juliet.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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# LOST FOR GOLD.

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## CHAPTER I.

MRS. MURTAGH'S repose that night was not more peaceful than on the previous one. Her rest was disturbed by thinking of Grant, and wondering what could have prevented him answering her summons. She never would have supposed he could have got her note at six o'clock, and deliberately put off coming until the next day; therefore she was anxious and irritable, and it is to be feared Harry had no easy time of it.

The night passed at length, the morning wore slowly on, but still no signs of Grant, and Mrs. Murtagh's impatience became more and more intense; even cooking had lost its charms for her, and she was about to despatch Harry to make inquiries after the truant, when a knock



was heard at the street door, and in a few minutes more she could identify his footstep ascending the stair.

She could hardly restrain herself from rushing to meet him when he entered the room, but she did contrive not to betray more anxiety than might be discovered in a few steps forward towards him. When he shook hands, she retained his in hers, leading him to the sofa, and making him sit down beside her.

"Why did you not come yesterday?" she asked, still holding his hand, as if unconsciously; an act, however, that he was well aware of, and that confirmed him in his preconceived idea that he might have everything his own way."

"I got your letter so late," he answered, "I was afraid my coming would disturb you; and I could not bear to inconvenience you, even for my own pleasure."

"Then it would have been a pleasure to you to come?" she asked. "I was beginning to fear it might be otherwise."

"Can you doubt me so far as that?" he said, in a low voice; but his eyes did not seek her face as he spoke—he feared they would betray him. He could command his voice, his acts,

his words, but his eyes would still be tell-tales, and he sought to conceal their meaning. "If this is what you think of me," he continued, "it would be better that we had parted the other day, and that I should never see you again, since I only lose myself more and more at every visit, without winning confidence from you."

He rose, as if to go, while he spoke, but she, still retaining his hand, stopped him.

"No, you must not leave me!" she exclaimed. "I know I was wrong in my thought; I cannot let you leave me thus. You said the other day you would not see me again, because my money made a barrier between us. Suppose that I don't see it so—that I think that gold should be a bond of union between us—what would you do then?"


"I do not see how that can be," he answered sadly. "I know your generosity and nobility of heart, and that you would never look down upon me from your position of social superiority, but those around you, all your old and valued friends, would cry out at once, 'Who is that fellow that is always hanging about after her, and who pretends he loves her, think-

ing that he may thereby secure her money? Do you think I could bear to know that such things were being said of me, and that perhaps you were blamed for permitting my adoration? No, nor even, could I bear the world's gossip myself, would I endure that it should meddle with your name; therefore we must part."

"Is there no way," she asked, after a pause, "in which we can remain friends, and be together sometimes, without incurring the censure of the public?"

"No way but one," he answered, looking gloomily at the hand that he now held in his, as she had before held his in hers. It was not a very ugly hand to look at, being well covered, and not very coarse-skinned; still it was not a pretty one, and he thought he should find some difficulty in doing the proper raptures, when he won his portly wife, it being an open question with him which would be the least disagreeable to kiss, her hand or her lips. The old and courtly style of kissing the hand was at a discount here, he knew, but still he might introduce it, if he found the other performance do too much violence to his fastidious feelings.

"And what is that way?" she asked, looking



down also, and feeling uncomfortable, for she saw he did not intend to help her through her difficult task; and his evident backwardness raised him still higher in her estimation. He did not reply, and after a minute's pause she took courage for the fatal step. If it was to be done at all, it was evident she must do it, and she loved him well enough even to sacrifice her self-respect so far as that. "I know what you mean," she continued, with rising colour—"why should I pretend I don't? You love me—you have almost said so in as many words, and yet you must leave me unless I marry you. Let it be so then. I care for you well enough not to count it a sacrifice sharing that money between us, that would only otherwise have separated us for ever. In spite of what the world would say if it knew what I'm doing, in spite of what it will say when it hears what we're going to do, you can't refuse me when I ask you to be my husband."

"No, dearest, I can't, and won't," he replied, taking her substantial form in his arms; "with your love, I don't mind facing the world's reports; and I hope we shall soon show them something to talk about. The sooner we are


married the better. There are such lots of fellows hanging about after you, that I get nervous sometimes, as if I thought they could carry you off and marry you against your will. When shall it be, dearest?"

"I don't think we could possibly have the wedding before next week," she murmured, hiding her face in his shoulder; "the people here talk so; they would say I was wanting in respect to poor Pat that's gone, if I married again before he had been in the ground a week; but after that there's nothing to prevent its being as soon as you like."

"Shall we say this day week, then?" he asked; and on her assenting, it was so settled.

"You don't think me very bold and forward to have asked you myself?" inquired his betrothed presently. "I knew your scruples would have prevented your ever doing it, and I could not lose you for them."

"I think you the best and wisest woman under the sun for having acted as your own good sense and good feeling prompted you," he replied. He had been determined that she should ask him, so that, in case of any discovery being made afterwards, he could excuse himself



by saying that he had never solicited her to take this step with him—that she had urged him to it, and that he had complied solely to please her. Besides, it had been so easy to lead her on to propose; she had set her heart on having him, and he had persuaded her he cared equally for her, but was prevented by honourable scruples from attempting to win her. The game had been played and won; fortune at last seemed smiling on him, and it was with a light heart he returned to Mrs. Jones's establishment that evening.

"Congratulate me, my friends," he said to his companions. "I have gained the great prize in the matrimonial lottery. Mrs. Murtagh is to be mine, and the wedding is to take place next week. We'll ask you all to the breakfast, where I hope you'll drink the health of the bride and bridegroom."


"I suppose, as Murtagh died only the other day, mourning-suits will be indispensable?" inquired Jim, with an air of satirical interest; "or perhaps the bride will leave off mourning for that day, and then it won't be necessary that we should be in black. You'll tell us all about that in time, won't you?"

Grant laughed: those that win can afford to laugh.

"Yes," he said, "I'll let you know all about that in time, but come down town with me after tea, and we'll have a champagne supper on the strength of it."

"Well done, my buck, that's your style!" shouted they all in chorus; and later on in the evening they trooped off together to the hotel, even Bully passing himself in on the general invitation; for since he had perceived that Grant was likely to be a person of consequence, and a favourite of fortune, he had thought it better to swim with the tide, and toadied his late opponent just as vigorously as he had at first abused him.

Whilst Grant and his companions were holding uproarious merriment in one of the best hotels of the place, the bride-elect was far differently occupied. The peculiar manner of dressing the kangaroo that she had often meditated, seemed to her a soothing and appropriate termination to so anxious and joyful a day. There was a quarter in the house that had been sent her by a friend the day before—a hind-quarter; it was just the part wanted for her



design, and she felt her friend's gift could not be better employed than by consecrating it to so happy a celebration. Imagine her, therefore, her handsome mourning-dress carefully tucked up, and covered from head to foot by a kind of brown holland dressing-gown, constructed on a design of her own, expressly for use in the kitchen, her stout figure seeming yet stouter from this addition to her covering, and her red face growing redder and redder from the combined effects of the fire and the additional clothing. In spite of what to most people would have been an uncomfortable degree of heat, she seemed perfectly happy, trotting about with the various implements necessary to her work, bending over the fire, tasting and stirring, as though she had but one idea in the world, and that was absorbed in the dish she was engaged in concocting. The cornstalk Harry, her sole attendant and companion, sat on the dresser, manufacturing a whistle with a piece of wood and a knife, and between whiles watching his mistress, and licking his lips, as the savoury odour of the forthcoming meal began to fill the house.

The experiment was a success, and before



the wedding-day Grant had been invited to dine with his betrothed, and partake of the triumphs of her skill ; doubtless he appreciated them more than he did her society, only the prospect of speedily possessing the money he coveted reconciling him to that infliction.

The day came at last, and the wedding passed off well, being chiefly remarkable for the cool composure displayed by both parties. The lady, as everyone knew, had been through the ceremony once before, and though her heart was more in it this time than the first, still she did not consider it necessary to let any sign of emotion betray that to the bystanders. As for Grant, he took it as everyone expected he would take it, namely, quite as a matter of course ; it was well understood by all the spectators that, on his side, at least, it was a mere mercantile transaction, and one in which they were all inclined to think he was the gainer.

“There’s such a thing as paying too dear for one’s whistle,” Andrews remarked to his companions later on in the day, “and blowed if I don’t think Mrs. Grant has done it ! £40,000 is a good sight of money for a chap like Grant, and I don’t even think he’s got a good temper to make the matter better.”

An opinion that was pretty generally agreed in by the others, who then proceeded to criticise the bride's dress and appearance. She wore a pale, silver-coloured silk, and had been most anxious to wear white, having only been restrained from so doing by Grant's assuring her it was not the thing for a widow. She grieved a little at this restriction, but was finally contented, as it gave her an opportunity for a greater display of colour than she could otherwise have contrived to accumulate on her person. The dress was trimmed with a number of small flounces, pink and blue alternately, and had been pronounced by the dressmaker in Melbourne as far superior to anything Paris could produce. The bonnet was a triumph of art—pink and green ribbons mixed plentifully, interspersed with mauve ostrich feathers—and was immensely admired by the few female friends she possessed on the diggings. Certainly the whole effect of the bride, as she walked up the narrow aisle, was to Grant rather awful than pleasing; but comforting himself by the reflection that he could soon alter all that, he recovered his self-possession, and went through the service with great composure.

The breakfast was given in one of the largest and best hotels in the place, and was certainly a very magnificent affair. Wine flowed freely; and if after awhile speeches became boisterous, and the miners rather uproarious, it was only what was to be expected, and, in fact, an honour done to the bride, who would have felt slighted had the things provided not been done justice to. At length, however, it became advisable that the party should disperse, Grant and his wife setting the example, and starting for Williamstown on their honeymoon trip. Mrs. Grant would have liked to go straight to Melbourne; but this Grant, for reasons of his own, did not deem advisable; indeed, for his ideas, Williamstown was too near the place where Ethel was, and it laid him open to the danger of being at any moment discovered. He therefore represented to Mrs. Grant that the comparative quiet of Williamstown was at such a time more congenial to his feelings than the life and bustle of Melbourne; and she, believing that love for her was the motive of his choice, quietly acquiesced in it. It was impossible, or at least it seemed impossible, that she should long continue ignorant of his real object in marrying her; for

his manner, though not unkind, was stiff and distant. He had laid down a rule, on which he determined to act from the beginning, that he would go his own way when, where, and how he chose, and that she should have no more of hers than just so much as was pleasing to him. He had hardly been a day in Williamstown when an idea struck him. Instead of hanging about in a place where, sooner or later, he was sure to be discovered, why should he not go to Sydney?

He had no sooner thought of this than he communicated his plan to his wife. The idea of the total change, and the hope of being able to show her finery in the northern capital, pleased her greatly, and she entered heartily into the scheme, urging him to find out at once when the next steamer sailed, and let them go by it. This advice suited his wants so exactly, that he called her a sensible woman, and bore her attentions with more patience for the rest of the day than he had as yet shown to her; a change which so pleased her that she became more convinced than ever of the strength and sincerity of his attachment. To their great joy they ascertained that a steamer

would leave Williamstown for Sydney next day. In it their passage was at once taken, and the following afternoon they steamed out of Port Philip, Mrs. Grant down below feeling extremely uncomfortable, and Mr. Grant on deck smoking a cigar, and contemplating the distant views of the Youang Hills, with Bateman's Hill and signal-station in the foreground, with much more pleasure and interest than that with which he had looked on them when he first beheld them, a fortnight or three weeks before.

## CHAPTER II.


THEY had a fair passage, notwithstanding which Mrs. Grant suffered horribly from sea-sickness, and her husband only looked in at her once or twice the whole way. She excused this conduct, however, thinking that perhaps the poor dear fellow might not feel very well himself, and was unable to bear the close air down below. He certainly was unable to bear it, because it was disagreeable, but for no other reason, and he cared nothing for what she might be suffering, as long as he was not inconvenienced by it.

It was a very warm day, though late in Autumn, when they entered Port Jackson, and steamed up to Sydney. The beauties of this magnificent harbour were fully appreciated by Grant. His eye had got accustomed to the mangy look of gum-tree forest, and the scenery did not, therefore, fail of producing its effect

on his mind, as it does fail generally with people fresh from the old country. Even the monotony of the low hills, so similar to each other in their outline, failed to give him the weary, dissatisfied feeling produced on strangers, who scan the horizon eagerly for some more elevated peak, or deeper depression, on which the eye can fasten, and obtain relief from the pretty but uniform scene around. He had got accustomed to the look of Australian scenery, and while he could not bring himself to go into raptures over the view before him, as the natives do, he could appreciate its beauties without feeling the disappointment experienced by new-comers to the country. As the steamer neared the wharf Mrs. Grant appeared on deck, sighing and groaning, but evidently better of her sickness.

"I tell you what it is, Grant," she said (she always called him by his surname), "you'll not get me to go back by sea—I've had enough of it for one while. I'll go by land, if I tramp every foot of the way myself."

"If you like, we'll not go back at all," replied her husband, good-humouredly. He knew he had treated her badly while on board, and he felt a little ashamed of himself for it. "Let us



get ashore as quick as we can. Have you got everything ready? That's right."


Presently they were in a hansom, having sent their luggage on in a van, and were driving up to Petty's Hotel.

Hotel life didn't suit Mrs. Grant; it prevented her exercising her natural talents in the cooking line, and she insisted on spending the afternoon hunting for lodgings, a search in which Grant did not think it at all necessary to join her, but went off by himself to see what was to be seen, and to find out what amusements were going on, which might help him to pass the time, and dissipate his money. Mrs. Grant, left to herself, after a long and protracted search, got tolerable lodgings in Woolloomooloo; they were furnished, and, as far as she could see, the furniture was tolerably new and clean, a matter of great importance in a climate like that of Australia, where every insect under the sun seems to thrive and increase with peculiar rapidity.

Returning to the hotel after her hunt was over, Mrs. Grant found her husband had not yet come in. It was dinner time, and she was hungry, but she did not wish to begin without



him, imagining that he would return immediately. Half an hour went by, then an hour, and she began to get very uneasy. The waiter had inquired several times whether she would dine, and when he next appeared, after she had been waiting an hour and a half, she asked him could it be possible anything had happened to Mr. Grant? He smiled blandly, and assured her that was impossible, advising her also not to wait for the gentleman any longer, as he had evidently stopped to dine out. He had taken in the state of affairs at a glance, and was tolerably satisfied, in his own mind, that the handsome young man who had married this stout, middle-aged woman for her money, was not likely to allow any consideration for her feelings to stand between him and his pleasures. He was doubtless off on the spree now, and the best thing his wife could do was to eat her dinner, without worrying herself any more about him. Being excessively hungry and tolerably satisfied by the waiter's representations that no bodily harm had befallen him, she consented to sit down to dinner; but here another disappointment awaited her. A dinner that has been really well cooked is more spoilt



by being kept back an hour or two than one that originally was spoilt by the cooking, and this she now experienced and lamented over.

"If I find," she mused, "that Grant stopped out for his own amusement, catch me ill-using good wittles again for him! The cod's tumbling to pieces, and the sauce is cold; there isn't a thing fit to be eaten—it's been kept so long. My word, won't I find out the meaning of all this when G. comes home! I'm a good-tempered woman about little things, but he may find he's trying me too far when he begins to trifle with cookery, and keep the dinner waiting."

Strengthened by this virtuous resolve, she once more spread her napkin over her knees, and was about to set-to again, when the door opened, and the delinquent entered.

"Hulloa!" he cried, "am I late? I think you might have waited, and not sat down without me. What's that?—fresh-water cod and oyster sauce?—yes, I'll have some. I'm hungry enough to eat everything in the house."

Quite taken aback by his coolness, Mrs. Grant helped him, without speaking, and for a few minutes watched him in silence, as he gave

proof of the truth of his assertion by the manner in which his helping disappeared.

"It's very good," he said at length—"I'll take some more, please."

"Mr. Grant," said his wife, solemnly, when affairs had reached this climax, "I bore your keeping the dinner back one hour and a half patiently enough; I waited till everything was cold, and was only persuaded by the waiter to sit down when I had given up all hope of your returning for dinner. I did not utter a word of complaint when you made no apology for such conduct, but now, when you call this 'good,' I can keep silence no longer. I see I have been mistaken in you. That it may have been good two hours ago, I think is likely; now it's real bad. I'm deceived in you. Only I thought you knew what was good cooking, and understood every bit as well as I do that wittles should never be kept waiting, I'd never have married you, that I wouldn't."

"Bless the woman!" laughed Grant, whilst the waiter disappeared hurriedly from the room, "is all that fuss because I liked the cod? Well, I daresay I should be more particular another time; but I'm so ravenously hungry now, do,

for mercy's sake, give me some more, and let that fellow bring up the meat. You know, at any rate, I appreciate your cooking."

"Of course," replied the lady, a little scornfully, though evidently mollified; "though I say it that shouldn't, you couldn't help liking mine—you'd be hard to please else."

As she spoke, she rang the bell, and presently the waiter re-appeared, the rest of the meal passing off smoothly.


Grant told his wife he had been knocking about the town exploring, seeing all that was to be seen, and that was what had kept him so late, the real truth being that he had spent a good part of the time in a café in King Street, making acquaintance with several Sydney residents, and trying his hand at billiards with some of them. This was the first time Mrs. Grant had showed any indications of temper, and while he laughed at it, her husband made a mental note of the cause that could so easily arouse her wrath. It might be convenient to him at some future day to make use of her temper as a plea for getting rid of her, and it behoved him to know how to rouse it, as other men would study how to avoid exciting it.

She told him she had found lodgings that suited, and that she would like to move into them at once.

"They are in William Street, Woolloomooloo," she explained; "I couldn't be comfortable here without my cooking and kitchen."

"Very well," he answered, lazily. It didn't much matter to him where they lived, so long as the money was forthcoming, and he could spend it. He had taken care to ascertain before his marriage how the money was invested; a large portion—about two-thirds of the sum—was in Victorian bonds, railroads in the colony, and other very paying and safe speculations, from which it was evident that, though the late Mr. Murtagh liked to turn his money over, he liked to do so safely. The remainder was engaged in some of the safest and largest mining companies, and notably a good share was sunk in the Burra-Burra copper mines in South Australia, showing that the shrewd old Irishman had not been dazzled by his near proximity to gold, but had been able to appreciate the better security, and eventually more lucrative nature of the copper speculation.

All this had been very pleasing to Grant, as



securing a large income with but little risk, or need for looking after the capital; and what pleased him still better, was the fact that the widow had not even thought of securing any of this to herself by settlements. Now, as his wife talked of her lodgings in Woolloomooloo, it struck him that it was a very petty way of setting to work, and that this woman had not really the large ideas that should have belonged to one with her means.

"I think you've made a mistake in getting lodgings, dear," he began. "We ought to have a house, and a good large one."

"Why?" she replied, with almost a startled look. "I thought for the short time we shall be here——"

"Well," he interrupted, "you see I like the place, and I think you will too, so I don't see that we can do better than settle down here; it's far preferable to Melbourne in my mind, though most people I know think the contrary."

"I'm sure I don't agree with you there," she answered, indignantly; she had lived so long in the colony that she was as loyal to it as a native Victorian. "I can't see what you see to like in this stifling hot hole," she went on,

never dreaming that her husband had a particular personal reason for his preference.

"Well, I do wish to remain here," he replied, "at least, for a year or two, and I wish to have a good house during that time. I'll go and look about it to-morrow, and you can pay whatever forfeit is necessary to get off the rooms you took. We shall want to entertain sometimes, if we remain here," he went on, cunningly; "and I'm sure you would enjoy that, as it would give you an opportunity of showing what you could do. You would like to hear it said that Mrs. Grant gave the best dinners in Sydney, I know."

He had touched the right chord in that appeal, and she gave way at once. Immediately a house and servants seemed as desirable in her eyes as before she had considered them undesirable and useless incumbrances; and so it was settled that they were to remain in Sydney, and not only remain there, but also appear in a style and with surroundings such as it had always been Grant's ambition to possess.

Money can do a good deal in Sydney, as elsewhere; perhaps it could not accomplish as much there then as it can now, but then any-

thing it could do it did for them, and where it failed to help them it failed to help all, so they were no worse off than others, and very shortly they were in possession of a beautiful house, situated on a promontory of land jutting out into the harbour. They were a few miles from the busiest part of the city, but Mrs. Grant had her carriage and pair, and Mr. Grant had his riding horses, so that a few miles more or less made little difference. Some ladies called with their husbands; they were not too much above the new-comer in manners and appearance, and she found she got on comfortably with them. As to her husband's friends, they appeared to be legion, and were constantly about the house, as many as it would hold being almost always stopping there. Though it was a good way round by land to the town, it was only about a mile by boat, and Grant, of course, kept one, but it was not a mode of conveyance at all patronized by his wife.

In all the outlay connected with this establishment, there was no reference at all to their actual income; she concluded Grant knew all about it, and that everything was right. He was perfectly well aware he was overrunning



his account, but satisfied himself by thinking that a short life and a merry one was best suited to him, and that, when the game was up, he could leave the poor woman whose money he had dissipated, and who believed herself to be his wife, and begin a fresh career elsewhere, under another name, and with as good a prospect of success as when he left Melbourne for the diggings, which had yielded him a golden harvest indeed.

Now that the house was constantly full of noisy, bustling guests, she saw but little of her husband; but when she did see him, he was not unkind, and allowed her to show her fond and foolish adoration of him in any way that conduced to his comfort. Anything that did not please him, caused him to show the devil in him at once; after the first outburst of this kind, she became frightened, and never ventured a remonstrance on any subject whatever.

He was a harder man now than when he had left Melbourne for the diggings; familiarity with evil had exercised its influence over his character, never at any time a very upright one, in spite of the few good and striking qualities that had once distinguished him;

even when forced by conscience to admit that his life was not what it should be, he was always ready to lay the blame of his wrongdoing on any other head but his own. It was his wife's fault (meaning Ethel) that he had run away from her, deceived and betrayed the woman with whom he now lived; it was her fault, if in the wild spendthrift life he was now leading, among companions as reckless as himself, he was pursuing a course of sin that was sure to call for punishment sooner or later. It was thus he tried to silence his conscience, and thus he in a great measure succeeded in doing so; he worked himself up to believing that his wickedness was the fault of others, and when, in some of his rare moments of reflection, he succeeded in convincing himself of this, he would exclaim:

“Why did I not marry Clara Singleton, a woman who loved me, and who could have kept me straight; the best woman in the world I do believe she was, and I, like a fool, left her.”

A good woman she was, it is true, good and wise, but he misjudged man's nature, his own nature sadly, if he thought that any woman, however good and wise, can keep the man

straight who is bent on going crooked. Convinced himself in this way that both the women with whom he had to deal had wronged him, he had no pity for the one he had so grossly deceived ; he treated her with indifference, not ill-using her, but not shrinking from paining her more by his contempt for her person, which he was at no trouble to hide, and aversion to her caresses, than he could have done by any physical violence. She was a woman with a high spirit, though low born and vulgar ; and sometimes her courage would rise, and she would resent this treatment, telling him boldly he had thought it worth his while to be gentle and loving when there was anything to gain, and that it was only when he had obtained all he wished for that he began to tire of her.

But in spite of seeing how he regarded her, in spite of her indignation at the change, she still loved, as women will love that for which they have once cared, when no vestige of the attributes that formerly attracted them remains. He thought nothing of the wrong he had done her in allowing her to suppose him an unmarried man. She believed it was all right, and that was enough ; if she came to find out the truth,


why, she was as good as a large proportion of women there, and that ought to be sufficient for her. So he reasoned, wilfully ignoring the fact that she had at least always conducted herself with decorum, at a time and in a place where few women had done so, and that therefore she deserved more honour and respect from him than to be thus degraded. What her honest though vulgar mind would suffer, if ever she made the discovery of how she was really situated, he did not care to inquire; and even had he known, he would have allowed it to distress him very little.

Now in the bustling riotous life he was leading at Sydney, he saw as little of her as he could; but still she contrived to get a short time with him every day to herself, and then she would exert all the arts she was mistress of to please him, and to lure back the fickle heart that she still believed had once been hers. It was sad to see the patience with which she strove to retain that which had never been more than a delusive phantom; sad to remark how day by day the conviction grew upon her that this love for which she had sacrificed everything was gone from her for ever. Many will smile at this

picture of a woman over forty, who would have plenty of pity to spare for a young girl in the same position ; but, if carefully considered, the elder woman is much the more miserable of the two.

To be deceived and deluded, to make shipwreck of life at her age, is an irretrievable loss. The poet tells us "hope springs eternal in the human breast," but the reign of hope in that particular direction is for most women of that age well-nigh over ; while though the blow may for a time deaden the feelings and check the buoyancy of the girlish spirit, the dreams and visions of youth will once more assert their sway, the enchantment of love may again be shed over the life, and the past disappointment be blotted out by the fulness of present happiness.

Thus time rolled on, the estrangement between them becoming every day greater, not through fault of hers, but from his deliberate determination and resolution. He was getting very tired of her, tired also of his life at Sydney ; he felt that he would like to change his surroundings, to begin life again in some other part of the colonies, and shake off for ever the millstone weight of this wronged woman, who did not




know herself wronged, and who might at any minute discover it, from about his neck. A hole had been made in the old miner's money, such a hole as rendered immediate retrenchment necessary, if any of it was to be kept at all; and though Grant did not particularly care to keep any, he wished very much to bring some away with him, to help him to begin afresh elsewhere. It was always easy to get; he had only to write to his brokers in Melbourne, ordering them to sell the shares he wished to dispose of, and forthwith the money was forwarded. There was no one in Mrs. Grant's interest to demand an account of how it was spent. Thus thousands of pounds had already passed through his hands and been dissipated by him, and he now gave instructions for a larger sale than any he had yet ordered, that he might be provided with ample means of support, whenever he made good his escape; for he had taught himself to consider it would be an escape, and that the duty he owed his supposed wife, was the most galling yoke of bondage ever laid upon any man's neck.

Little thinking what was hanging over her head, Mrs. Grant solaced herself as best she might with driving, shopping, and cooking, her

worst trial, after the estrangement of her husband, being the advent of a "brickfielder," which, in spite of all the precautions she could take in shutting windows, and otherwise hermetically sealing the house, would fill it with fine dust, that almost ruined her costly new furniture, and caused her to shed tears of vexation over the cleansing job she had to perform afterwards. Her servants also worried her life out, and she often thought with regret of the little house at Ballarat, and the cornstalk Harry, who, if possessed of all the usual impudence and mischievous qualities of cornstalks in general, was fond of his mistress, and still more fond of bribes, by the aid of which she had often induced him to undertake jobs for her to which he otherwise would have scorned to put his hand.

To get away from Sydney, where he was so well known, without being remarked, was a matter of some difficulty, and gave Grant cause for serious reflection. Finally he decided to start overland for Newcastle, in his miner's dress, carrying his "swag" on his back, as they are accustomed to do, and begging his lodging and food at the houses he passed on the way. All




along the coast-line in that direction he was pretty sure of finding shepherds' huts on the runs, and squatters' houses at intervals, besides here and there small villages. He would carry his money in a belt underneath his clothes, and with his gun and ammunition he had no fear of getting into trouble. He would not probably be more than a day and a half, or at most two days, in reaching Newcastle, which lies about fifty miles north of Sydney. Arrived there, he would proceed by steamer to B—, and in that place look out for some employment that would give him a position among the gentry; for Queensland was then pre-eminently an aristocratic country, and as such suited his prejudices better than either of the other colonies he had been in.

Accordingly, one morning, after settling all his plans, he left the house early, carrying his mining dress in a parcel under his arm; and going off into a part of the bush where he had previously concealed his blankets and other necessaries, he changed his clothes, throwing those he left off into the harbour, with a heavy stone tied up in them. This completed, he shouldered his swag, and turning towards the



sea-coast, strode off bravely with a light heart, in spite of the two days of hardship that he knew lay before him. When far enough from Sydney to be out of danger of meeting anyone who could recognise him, he took to the road, and got on better than when wandering along over a trackless country, and only guided by the coast-line. After awhile he felt this marching along without a companion very lonely work, and would have liked to join some of the bullock-drays he was constantly passing, merely for the sake of companionship, but he found their rate of travel so slow that, with all his desire for society, it seemed to him better to press on by himself. Indeed, the bullock-drivers, as a rule, were rather below any of the other men he had yet met with in the Colonies, and though, as far as religion was concerned, he had no scruples about swearing, still these men carried it to a pitch that horrified him, more from the low state of mental culture it represented than because its blasphemy distressed him.

He pressed on, therefore, and at midday stopped at a public-house by the wayside. He asked for dinner, and was given it, for which he



was not expected to pay anything, if he took something to drink; but he had not yet accustomed himself to swallow the vile stuff sold in those wayside taverns, and contenting himself with a draught of warmish water, he again pursued his way. Towards evening he judged he must have done about thirty miles walking, and feeling, in spite of his being accustomed to that kind of exercise, that he had done quite enough, he turned off to a column of smoke he saw ascending through the trees not far off. It proved to be a shepherd's fire; he had just driven his flock into the paddock for the night, and was setting about cooking his evening meal. He welcomed the stranger joyfully, asked the latest news from Sydney, and when he had heard all that Grant could tell him on that point, he wandered off to the old country, inquiring how long it was since Grant had left it, why had he come out, where he was from, and a hundred similar questions, to all of which Grant returned precisely such answers as suited his convenience, and, moreover, learned all about his new friend with an ease and rapidity that astonished him. As to himself, he gave his name as Griffiths, declared he knew little of Sydney, had, in fact, only

just passed through it; that he had landed in South Australia, but had got tired of that, and was determined to try the most northern of the Australian Colonies for awhile; adding that, if he didn't do there, he should make tracks for California.

"Not a bad idea that," answered the shepherd. "I see you're one of my sort, a rambler. I went to California first, and came on here by Queensland—Moreton Bay we called it in those days; but I'm getting older and lazier now—shepherding suits me, and I think I shall hang on here a while longer."


Thus they chatted till their subjects of conversation began to get exhausted, Grant, or Griffiths as he had now become, being every moment more and more astonished that a man with the education and even talent that this person seemed to possess, could find no better occupation than herding sheep in the Australian Bush. By-and-by, from little things that dropped from his companion, he began to comprehend the reason for this strange state of affairs. Drink was at the bottom of it—that fatal madness which has ruined so many of the cleverest men the world

has possessed, and which, when it seizes upon a fine mind, seems to work greater havoc there than on the dull capacities of meaner intellects.

As they rolled themselves in their blankets and turned over to go to sleep, Griffiths thanked his stars that he, at least, had never fallen under the influence of that terrible fascination, his having kept clear of it proving to his mind that, after all, he was not such a bad fellow, if he had not fallen into the hands of those two women, whom he mentally constituted his scapegoats, whenever the course of his reflections tended to show him that his life might be open to censure. Next morning they were both up betimes, and Griffiths started on his way, stiff and rather footsore from his tramp the day before. He worked the first-named evil off before he had gone very far, whilst the other increased, until by the time he arrived at Newcastle, late in the afternoon, he was very much done up indeed, and hardly inclined to take advantage of the boat that was starting for B—. It was better, he reflected, however, that he should put as great a distance between himself and Sydney as possible, therefore conquering his disinclination to go further, he went on board, and tak-

ing the first unoccupied corner, lay down with his swag under his head.

It was not a comfortable voyage; the steamer was small and dirty—in fact, it was not likely she would be otherwise, as she carried a large cargo of coal, and did not seem as if she had been cleaned since she was first put into the trade—a characteristic in which both her captain and crew bore her company. However, these were troubles Griffiths had made up his mind to expect whilst roughing it in miner's garb, and he was fully determined to indemnify himself for all his discomforts when he arrived at his destination, which they did on the second day after he came on board. He had money enough about him to enable him to live in comfort, even in luxury, for some time; and during that period he hoped to obtain some employment that should keep up his position among the squatting aristocracy, and enable him to earn his living without too much exertion. There are no sinecures to be had in a young country, but that did not seem so great a drawback to him as might have been expected, for he had tried idleness so long, that the idea of work, if it was not of too severe a nature, was acceptable.



Immediately on landing he repaired to the best hotel he could see, and though his miner's dress, and the fact of his luggage being comprised in the compass of his swag, might be supposed to be against him, people of that class, since the discovery of the gold fields, are so often possessed of great riches, that his appearance passed without comment, and he was admitted immediately. One of his first acts was to get himself a complete rig out at the tailor's, knowing well that good clothes are all over the world a great set-off to good manners; and while a neat mining dress, and considerable skill in the use of nature's weapons, might be the high road to popularity at Ballarat, here public favour would have to be conciliated in a very different way.

His purchases completed, and himself looking the distinguished gentlemanly person that even his miner's garb had not been able quite to disguise, he went to the coffee-room, the window of which opened into one of the principal streets, and amused himself by watching the passers-by, looking at the papers, and talking to those who entered. Thus, in a few hours, he had begun his acquaintance with the gentlemen of B——

from whom he hoped in the future to obtain assistance and support.

As day wore on at Acacia Park, Grant's Sydney residence, his absence began to be noticed. Some of his numerous friends turned up to spend the day with him, to get him to take them out fishing in his boat, or otherwise take the task of amusing them for the day upon himself. A vain hope; he was not to be seen, and Mrs. Grant, when consulted as to where he was likely to be found, was as much in the dark as any-one else. She was not alarmed, however—thought he might have gone out for the day, and would be in by dinner-time; but when that hour came and passed, and still he did not turn up, she began to be anxious. Was it possible anything could have happened to him; or was he only spending the evening in Sydney, as he frequently did? It was odd he had not mentioned the matter to her, as he generally did when he intended to dine out; still it might have been a sudden thought, and, at any rate, she did not let his absence interfere with her enjoyment of any of the good things set before her.

Evening closed in, and still nothing was

heard of him ; but as, when he spent the evening at Sydney, he never was home till the small hours of the morning, that did not prevent poor, unsuspecting Mrs. Grant from having a very sound night's rest ; she only began to feel seriously uneasy when, next morning, she was told he had not been home at all. Now, staying out all night was a thing he never did without letting her know beforehand, or sending her a message, if he was persuaded to do so suddenly ; therefore, she became very anxious, and sent a servant into Sydney to see if anything had been heard of him there. Of course the man returned saying he had been seen nowhere since the day before yesterday. Inquiries were immediately set on foot by his numerous friends, and the native police were called in, Mrs. Grant the while passing her time between violent hysterics and a kind of half-sensible state, when she would offer enormous rewards to whoever would discover traces of her lost husband.

But Grant had heard of the native police before, and their wonderful powers of tracking, and had taken the precaution not only to walk on the driest and stoniest ground he could



find, but had also drawn a pair of thick woollen stockings over his boots, thus lessening the chances of his leaving any distinguishable track. And so the police found it; for after diligent and protracted search, they were obliged to give up all hope of tracing him, and his disappearance was generally considered to be another of the numerous cases of people being lost in the bush, leaving no trace of how they disappeared, or what was their ultimate fate. Such was the general opinion; but though amongst her friends his widow appeared to acquiesce in this decision, yet in her heart she had doubts as to its correctness. It was not so unusual in Australia for a man who wished to leave his wife to disappear suddenly, as to render it quite improbable Grant might have adopted such a course; and though the world at large were not aware that he might have had reasons for wishing to avoid her, she knew that for some time he had found his bondage irksome, and desired to be free from it. Moreover, when his affairs came to be looked into, she found that very little of her large fortune was remaining.


During the three years they had been in

Sydney, not only had they spent more than double their income every year, but she discovered also that her husband had been in the habit of drawing large sums of money from their principal, and their enormous claims were sent in every day from Sydney houses to whom they owed money. After settling everything, paying off all their debts, giving up Acacia Park, selling carriages, horses, everything, there would only remain £5,000 out of the £40,000 she had brought him three years before on her marriage. She found out, also, that, very shortly before he disappeared, he had drawn five thousand pounds, of which she could not discover any traces as to where and when, or to whom it had been paid—thus strengthening her in her belief that he was not lost in the bush, as had been supposed, but was enjoying himself and his newly-acquired liberty somewhere with her money.

She was not a bad-hearted woman, and she loved this man, who had used her so ill, as foolish women will love unscrupulous men, who are not withheld from bullying them by any romantic ideas about woman's weakness and want of protection; she grieved, therefore, that

he had been driven to take such a step. He had mistaken her greatly if he thought she would have been angry and abusive about the loss of her money. She had appreciated being rich; she had long ago learnt to acknowledge that it was her money had purchased him, but having gained him, and having by him been made poor, she would have been very well contented to bear poverty with him, never grumbling, or reminding him that, but for his extravagance, she would have been a rich woman still. He had not understood this; he had taken her to be like the women of the world to which he belonged—vain, frivolous, and mercenary. However much she might have deserved the first two epithets, the last she had never merited, and he should have known her better than to think of it in connection with her.

Now that he had left Sydney, and that she had no longer money to keep her house, she was greatly puzzled what to do. She would have liked to return to her old friends at Ballarat; in spite of her money having made to itself wings, she was pretty sure they would welcome her cordially, and amongst them she would feel more at home than amongst the



disorderly set into which she had fallen in Sydney. But then there was still a drawback to her doing as she liked; she fancied, from her husband's having taken so large a sum of money, that he had gone inland, somewhere into the Riverina, among the squatters; and she thought she would be less likely to fall upon his traces down in the South than where she was at present situated. She reflected over it for a few days, and finally determined to go and pay some visits to friends in different parts of Victoria, who had written to her on hearing of her misfortunes; after which she would return to Sydney, where she knew her husband would come to look for her, if he ever desired to make friends with her again. This being all arranged, she sold her effects in Sydney, and was soon steaming south on her way to Melbourne.

## CHAPTER III.

WHILE matters were thus progressing with Mounteagle, or Grant, as he had for a time called himself, his wife, living quietly in an out-of-the-way street in Melbourne, drove her humble trade with varying success. Some weeks she would have plenty of customers, and matters went tolerably pleasantly with her; at other times she would have little or nothing to do, and would be almost inclined to think her attempt a failure. Thanks, however, to her settled income, she was never in want; and though lonely enough, was not as unhappy, after the first month or so, as might have been expected. In the first place, she got accustomed to her sorrow, and there is a great deal more in that view of consolation than many people would be willing to believe. The mind cannot always remain at the highest pitch either

of sorrow or of joy—gradually the tension of the nerves gives way, and a kind of dull contentment follows; there is so much less suffering than there has been, that the heart persuades itself it is free from pain altogether.

Thus it was with Ethel—the despair she had felt at first, when she knew herself abandoned in a strange land, had died away, the lost feeling had worn off, and though she sometimes mourned over the love she had failed to keep, and that was no longer dear to her, it was not with an overwhelming sorrow, as she had grieved at first. The people she was with were kind, and, above all, her only real friends in that wide place. The officers of the *Templeton* were still there, and as good to her as ever. Even Webster, who formerly had been her husband's friend more than hers, was kind and thoughtful to her now; he had found out that, charming as Mounteagle was, he could not be otherwise than a bad fellow to treat so a poor little woman who, whatever her faults might have been, was certainly fond of her husband. But Ethel's greatest friend, and the one who all these weeks stood by her most truly, was Laneton. When the *Templeton* left, she was very lonely, and as

years rolled on, she continued to be so, for though she made friends there, they were none of them the kind of people with whom she had been used to associate, and there was consequently a want of sympathy between them. Though she wrote to her father again and again, she received no answer from him, that gentleman merely remarking, as he put her letter into the fire, that she would have it so, and must now bear it as best she could.

During all these years not once had Ethel obtained any tidings of her husband, and at length, though she felt he was not dead, she ceased to care about him, or to speculate upon what his circumstances might be. She had long ago learned to look upon her marriage as a mistake—the love she had felt for her husband had not been the faithful, all-enduring affection it should have been; and the nature of his for her she had not failed to comprehend before they had been very long married.

One day, rather more than three years after she first landed in Australia, a portly, well-dressed woman came to her shop to order a bonnet. She was fat, vulgar, and red-faced—one who could never have had any beauty

beyond her good-natured expression, but who was not the less for that extremely particular about her appearance, and tried on a multitude of bonnet shapes before she found one to suit her. Suddenly, as Ethel was fitting a shape on her troublesome customer's head, her eye was caught by a large brooch, containing a portrait, that the lady wore conspicuously at her throat, as a fastening for her shawl. The portrait in the brooch was a likeness of Herbert Mount-eagle—about that there could be no mistake; and Ethel's head swam, and her eyes grew dizzy as she gazed upon it.

"Might I ask you of whom that picture is a portrait, ma'am?" she inquired. "I knew a person very like it myself once."

"It is the portrait of my poor dear husband," answered the lady, with a sigh. "He disappeared suddenly a few months ago, and it is for him I am in mourning at present. Many people think he was lost in the bush, and perished. I don't believe that. I think he is off on a spree somewhere, and that he will turn up again all right by-and-by; but of course, as others imagined him dead, I had to follow public opinion, though I didn't feel it necessary



to keep on widow's mourning more than a month, and I shall soon go back into colours again. They're cleaner, and cheaper, and cooler; and, after all, it doesn't matter what one wears when the heart mourns truly."

As she finished speaking, the bereaved woman heaved a sigh that almost blew away poor, fragile Mrs. Mounteagle, who timidly inquired what was his name.

"Why, Grant, the same as mine," answered the widow, rather tartly. "He was Mr. Grant, and I am Mrs. Grant."

"It is a very sad story," replied Ethel, pretending to take an interest in her customer's tale, in order that she might have an opportunity of questioning her still further. "Had you been long married when this melancholy event occurred?"

"We had been married just three years," replied the woman, little thinking what missing links she was supplying in the history of her milliner's life. "I met him at the diggings at Ballarat, about a hundred miles from here. I had been married before, to a dear, good man, and a kind husband, but not a man like him; this portrait does not do him justice—he was

twice as handsome, a man whose like you never see! My first husband died just as he arrived at Ballarat, and I married him not long afterwards. Then we left Victoria, and went to Sydney, New South Wales, where we have lived ever since. A strange story, isn't it? And am not I an unfortunate woman, to have lost two such husbands, one so short a time after the other? I often wonder I am not more of a wreck than I am!"


"It is sad, indeed," said Ethel, now certain that the man who had married Mrs. Grant, and whose portrait was before her, was no other than her husband. "You have no idea where he can have gone, if he was not lost in the bush, as has been supposed?" she continued.

"No idea at all," answered the widow. "The police searched for him everywhere, but they can neither find any traces of him, nor find anyone of that name answering to his description."

"But he would have changed his name if he left Sydney with the intention of not being recognized," suggested Ethel, helping this woman in the search for her husband, why she did not know, as she told herself she could never go

near him, or have anything to do with him again. He had acted no worse than might have been expected, from what she knew of his character; but she understood him better now than she had done formerly, and she preferred the quiet, prosperous life she was leading, to finding herself again dependent on him for happiness and comfort. This poor woman whom he had wronged should be welcome to have him if she could find him, and if he would consent to receive her, which Ethel fancied he would, as he would be unwilling to confess the deception he had practised on her, for fear of the law. She therefore continued—"Why do you not put that portrait into the hands of the police? By its help, if he is living under a feigned name, anywhere in that, or any of the neighbouring colonies, he would be discovered."

"You are right," answered Mrs. Grant. "You must have seen sharp practice somewhere, as you know a little about other things than bonnets. There, that shape will do. I should like it trimmed in the same style as the one in your hand, but not as deep mourning, scarlet and black, I think, would be quite enough. Send it to that address. I shall do as you ad-



vise me about the brooch, when I go back to Sydney, which will be about the end of this month." And so saying, Mrs. Grant left, leaving Ethel perfectly bewildered with all she had heard that day.

The man, for whose loss she had long felt real sorrow, had, after all, cared so little for her that, immediately on his leaving her, he had gone through the mockery of a marriage with this woman, deceiving her, and laying himself under the power of the law, whenever it should be discovered that he had married again while his wife was living. What had tempted him to act thus she could hardly understand, for Mrs. Grant had made no mention of her money, and though she was handsomely dressed, yet that conveyed little idea of what her wealth might be, as it might be her best suit she had on, and her other surroundings need not necessarily be in any way to match. Besides, her appearance and accent conveyed the idea of a person of low class, and it was evident she never could have had any beauty, that might be supposed to have tempted her faithless husband. Unless he had done it to show his contempt and aversion for her, she could not understand

it, and to some such motive she now ascribed it. That he was alive, she did not for one minute doubt; his sudden disappearance was too like the trick he had played her for her to believe one minute that it was unpremeditated. Where he was now she could not guess, nor in what manner she should next hear of him; but a kind of terror came over her as to what the end of this man would be, who seemed so steadily progressing in evil, that he was already a different being from the person whom she had loved a few years ago.

She wondered whether she was in any way to blame for this—whether she was accountable for the warp in his character; but whatever he might say or think, she could not feel herself guilty. In her way she had really loved him—had been true, and patient, and tender with him, but all to no purpose. He had tired of her, and turned from her, leaving her alone in a strange land.

He had left her of his own free will, without one regretful feeling—had left her to poverty or degradation, for aught he knew, and she was now resolved that she would never willingly return to him. If the woman who called

herself Mrs. Grant could find him and keep him, she would be glad—it might prevent him doing more wrong; but she would never come forward either to accuse him of the crime he had committed, or claim him as her own. Free of her he had chosen to be—free of her he should remain for ever.

At B——, where Griffiths, as he must now be called, had settled, his handsome face and gentlemanly manners soon gained him plenty of friends. He had money, and went out a good deal into society; few questions were asked as to his former life and career, and those he easily answered, saying that his father had been an Englishman with some little fortune, who had spent his time knocking about the world, and that he, since he had left school, had led the same rambling, pleasant life, by which means he had dissipated nearly all his money, and should now be very glad of some employment that would give him an opportunity of earning his living. The good people of B—— gave implicit credence to this story, and thought it a great pity that so handsome and distinguished a young man should be in so straitened a position. He rode well, danced

well, talked well, flirted well, some members of the other sex were heard to affirm—why should he not have an equal capacity for doing work well? Thinking thus, his friends, whom he had selected with great judgment from among the most influential members of society, succeeded in obtaining for him the appointment of Clerk of the Crown at B——, an appointment that they promised to supplement by something better as soon as opportunity should offer. To say the truth, it was not a post that at all suited Griffiths's views; he would have liked, had that been possible, to be supported by his friends without being obliged to burden himself with any fixed employment, but as he knew that such an attempt on his part would alienate the favour he had gained, he accepted what was offered him with a show of gratitude, thinking that, even if the better things promised did not turn up, he still saw a way before him of improving his prospects, which, he was pretty sure, would not disappoint him.


Whilst going out in society—a mode of spending his time that his present occupation did not too much interfere with—he met constantly a young lady of the name of Joyce.

She had not many months come out from England, whither she had been sent for her education; and besides being pretty and pleasant, she was, a point of far more consequence in Griffiths's eyes, the daughter of one of the richest squatters in that part of the country, a man of the highest influence and position. Such a match as this would be, would lay the foundation of equal influence and rank for Griffiths, as she was the only child of her parents; therefore, whoever she married would probably, in course of time, come in for all Mr. Joyce's land and wealth. The young lady herself seemed to admire the handsome stranger, and her mother did not discourage his constant visits at their house. Everything promised well, and though at times the remembrance that, if his identity should ever be discovered, his evil deeds would be brought to light, caused him to hesitate for a while, still such prudential considerations seldom troubled him long, and the next time he met the young lady he would 'redouble his attentions. He liked her well enough, too. She admired him, and that flattered his vanity; she was pretty, and that pleased his eye; but, above all, she



had a good deal of the shrewd worldliness that characterises male colonists. She knew exactly what her money was worth, had surveyed all the aspirants to her favour, and had decided that amongst them all, in spite of the drawback of his poverty, there were none better fitted to grace the position to which her husband must aspire than the young man who at present occupied the office of Clerk of the Crown.

Having made this decision, she was determined to have him; and it would not much have mattered whether he was anxious for it or not, she would still, in all probability, have carried her point. It was this worldly wisdom that so pleased Griffiths—he said to himself that she was a woman who, if she found they did not get on well, would give him a liberal allowance to live elsewhere, so that she might get rid of him; and that as long as they continued to pull well together, she would make life pleasant to him by her social talents. It would not be here as it had been at Sydney, where the entertaining of his guests devolved entirely on him, because Mrs. Grant had not an idea on the subject of the duties of a hostess; still less would



it be a repetition of his life with Ethel, when there were no means on either side adequate to entertaining properly; and when, if they had been able to do so, his wife's mania for flirting would have rendered harmony between them impossible.

He saw that Miss Joyce had made up her mind to have him, and he determined she should be enabled to gratify her wishes without any more opposition on his part than would suffice to give interest to the game. Besides, he liked her in a kind of way—something between the respect and veneration he had felt for Clara Singleton and the passionate love he had experienced for Ethel Courtenay. It was rather a tepid, lukewarm feeling, but he could not expect to revive the emotions of his youth; and he thought it would help him to settle down quietly in Queensland, and there pass his life happily and steadily.

He was determined the young lady should give him considerable encouragement—should, in fact, do half the business for him herself, before he would actually propose. There were many advantages, to his mind, in such an arrangement: in the first place, it saved him a

great deal of trouble, and gave him the certainty beforehand of what his fate would be; then, to a man in his position, it was even of more consequence than it would be to a person who had not already laid himself open to censure on these matters. It would be an extenuating circumstance in the eyes of his friends, if the truth ever came out, that he had taken no active steps in the wrong direction himself—he had simply been passive, and had drifted into crime from the force of circumstances and the influence of others, rather than from his own will and inclination. He had not long, however, to wait before Miss Joyce determined he must be brought to declare himself—she had already been out three or four months, and was not yet married. It was true this was her own fault—a fact that, in all times and all ages, has been allowed to take off a little from the detractions such a state of affairs gives rise to; but none knew better than Sophy Joyce that before long even that would cease to be considered an excuse for her; and that, if she wished to occupy her present rank in society, she must take immediate steps to recover the prestige she was losing.

The conquest of the handsome new-comer would more than effect her purpose, and this she now determined to achieve, and publish in an official manner as soon as possible. They were out riding along with a large party of ladies and gentlemen one evening, and as Griffiths's attentions had by this time excited comment, they were left completely to themselves. The moon had risen, and the bush through which they were passing was looking its best under the silvery light that threw great streaks of black shadow from the tree-trunks across their pathway, at which their horses shied sometimes, and leaped over them, as though they had been palpable barriers in the way. The thin foliage of the gum trees looked fuller and more abundant, its general scantiness being less apparent when the light that poured through it was so mellow and beautiful. None of the strange weird noises heard at night in the Australian bush, startled and disturbed them; the forest glades were too full of trampling horses and laughing riders, for any of the sounds that arise only in intense silence to be heard; the beauty of the night, the calm, pale moonlight, the distant voices falling pleasantly

on the ear, all encouraged sentiment, if any such feeling found place in either of their hearts; and, to speak correctly, it was sentiment rather than love that possessed them both—hence the passage was easy from conversation on the beauties around to the subject that engrossed them. Miss Joyce began it first by asking whether her companion intended to remain long at B——; she had heard that day from her father that he and some other friends had obtained for Mr. Griffiths the post of Inspector of Police, which she hoped he would like better than his former appointment, and which might prove an inducement to him to remain among them.

“Is it really true?” he asked eagerly. “I had heard nothing of it when I came out to ride this evening. Of course I shall like it better than what I have at present, and I hope it will make some difference in my mode of life.”

“How do you mean?” she inquired. “It always has seemed to me that you live very comfortably, though I should think a single life is also very often a lonely one; but then you are so popular among the gentlemen here, you can’t feel that much.”

"Do you think I can't?" he replied, fixing his eyes on hers in a way that caused her to look in the opposite direction hurriedly. "Suppose I cared for some one, was in her society constantly, and yet dared never say what I felt for her, because my position and fortune were not equal to hers—then don't you think I should find my life lonely?"

"But you are wrong to think position or fortune could interpose a barrier between you and any woman you loved," answered Miss Joyce earnestly. "You are by birth a gentleman, equal to any out here in this colony; you have the manners and appearance of a higher class than that of which our colonial society is generally composed. Why, then, should you think wealth or position could interfere between you and your wishes?"

"In the old country it often does," he replied; "and I fear that even here there are few girls who would dare to forego those advantages in the man they married, if they possessed them themselves."

"Try them," she answered. "I think you misjudge our colonial ladies, testing them by your cramped, old-world standard. I am sure

I, for one, would be above such prejudices, if I cared for a man so circumstanced."

"Would you?" he asked eagerly; then continued sadly—"But, after all, what does it matter what you would do, if you don't care for anyone in such a position?"

"How do you know I don't?" she answered softly, looking up at him with a shy, troubled glance, that was partly acted, and in part really felt.

"Do you?—can you?" he whispered, pressing closer to her side, and laying his hand on her horse's neck. "Is it possible that you could think kindly of a poor stranger like me—that I can have any hope of winning your love?"

She laughed a light, pleasant laugh, that had plenty of mirth in its sound, as she answered,

"Don't be high-flown, please; you know very well I like you dearly. I don't know much about loving, so can't say whether I've gone as far as that; but I've shown you plainly what I think of you, and you have let me see you are not indifferent to me, so all this pretty passage of words we have been going through might have been spared, as we understand each other perfectly. I suppose, however, it was the cor-

rect thing to do ; but now that you've done it, I may give you a straightforward answer, without any nonsense, and my answer is this : If my parents consent, I'll marry you, when and where you choose ; if they don't agree, you must go and look elsewhere, for I can't afford, neither can you, to marry without a good settlement, and that they'll give me if my choice meets their approval. Don't let's spoon any more to-night ; it's time to turn homewards now, and I like a gallop better than talking sentiment."

"A very sensible choice," replied Griffiths, spurring his horse after her, "but one few women have wit enough to make."

"Or men sense enough to acquiesce in," retaliated Miss Joyce, leaping her horse over a fallen tree as she spoke. "I think, as a rule," she went on, "that we women are not the greatest transgressors on that head ; in my experience men do far the largest share of it."

"Has your experience been extensive?" he asked with interest.

"Don't be inquisitive, sir," she replied, with a merry laugh. "I daresay it has been as extensive as that of most young ladies in my



position ; but I am not going to betray the secrets of the confessional ; and now we're out of the wood, let's race after those people in front, the winning-post the first couple we meet, and the winner gets a pair of gloves from the loser to-morrow."

Thus the matter was settled between them ; and on applying to Mr. Joyce, Griffiths was greatly relieved to find his ambition would meet with no opposition in that quarter. He had received notice of his appointment as Inspector of Police, and was now in a fair way to further advancement ; for the Joyces, being almost the oldest settlers in the colony, had influence, and were connected with almost everyone of importance in the place.

A few days after this change in his circumstances had occurred, when he returned, towards evening, to his house, after visiting Miss Joyce, what was his astonishment, on entering his sitting-room, to see a female figure sitting there, that rose as he entered, and, turning, revealed to his eyes the portly form and unmistakeable jovial face of Mrs. Grant. Not that Mrs. Grant at that minute looked jovial—far from it ! If such a good-natured face as hers could ever be

described as wearing a malignant expression, it was at that minute, as she walked up to him, trembling with rage, and gasping for breath, as she cried,

"So I hear you are going to marry again, and I still alive! If there's a law in the land, I'll take care you don't. You reprobate, you've broke one woman's heart, and now you want to try the same game on with another!" And, overcome by rage and grief, she burst into tears.

"Confound the woman, how did she get here!" was Griffiths's mental comment. His course of action was to take her by the shoulder and shake her, telling her to stop crying.

"See," he said, "you have come here where nobody asked for you, and where you weren't wanted, and as you've come, I'll have some conversation with you; but first stop that infernal whimpering, which you ought to know is of no use with me, and listen to what I've got to say. To make matters shorter, and that you may understand things more clearly, I'd better begin by telling you you're not my wife at all."

He stooped and looked at her with a devilish

grin on his handsome features, which she, glancing up, caught, and it maddened her. Springing out of the chair into which she had sunk to have her cry out comfortably, she advanced towards him as though she would have torn his eyes out; but, though he never stirred, or moved a muscle, there was something in the expression of his cold, quiet face that cowed her, and she drew back, saying,

“I don’t believe you. The wedding was performed legal in the church down at Ballarat; the registry can be found in the books; how can you go past that, I should like to know? You’re my husband, as sure as you stand there, black-hearted villain though you are!”

“Strong language, Mrs. Grant, and rather harder than the epithets you used to lavish on me in days gone by,” sneered the man who had once pretended to love her. “Nevertheless, what I tell you is true—you are not my wife, though the ceremony was performed as you say; and there is a very good and sufficient reason why you should not be. I was married before I ever saw you, and my wife was alive when I went through the ceremony with you, and may be alive now, for all I know.”

Mrs. Grant dropped like a stone into the chair behind her, as he uttered these words in his calm, measured voice, and with a wicked amusement in his cold, clear eyes. She gazed into his face with a horror-struck glance, as though spell-bound by this startling intelligence; but after a few seconds' dead silence, her fury mastered her terror, and she cried, loudly,

"I'll have you persecuted for bigamy! The law can punish you for marrying me while your first wife is living, poor thing! But I'll revenge both her and me. While a penny of money remains to me, I'll see that we get justice, and that you'll repent this yet in prison."

For a minute he changed colour, and looked about uneasily, as though seeking for something, whilst she yelled this out in her rage and fury. Then he recovered himself, and stepped up to her.

"Mrs. Grant," he said, "take my advice, and speak quietly, or it will be worth my while to insure your silence. As to this absurd threat, that you will prosecute me for bigamy, I think you can hardly have reflected sufficiently on the matter, or you would not have said that. Remember that, though you might thus revenge

yourself on me, you would proclaim your own position to the world. I do not know whether you think that point in the case worth consideration, I merely mention it to you, for fear you might have overlooked it."

Her position! It was true she had not thought of it—she had not realized it before; now, as he brought it to her mind, she shrunk into herself, and remembered that it was as he had said; without her own knowledge or intention, by no evil doing of her own, she had fallen from her high estate, as one of the good and pure, to almost the same level with the outcasts she had so often seen and wondered at. True women would pity her, if they knew the cause of her position, but she could hardly hope to mix with them, to be looked up to and received as one of their number, if once the secret was discovered. She had always been proud of her character, as a woman at whom the breath of scandal had never been raised, and that, too, in a time and at a place where such a character was rare. Must she forfeit now this proud pre-eminence, and hear people pity her for having, in her old age, fallen a victim to such a terrible fate? She could not

bear it. Vengeance itself, dear as it would have been to her, was not worth that. She was conquered once more by this man, for whom she now entertained both fear and hatred. As the full extent of all the misery that had come upon her, and her utter helplessness, dawned upon her, she drew out a large handkerchief, and burying her face in it, burst into such a passion of tears that the man standing before her, waiting to hear what course she would adopt, knew that he had gained the victory, and that she was subdued.

"So that is all settled," he said, in an easy, jaunty tone, when he heard her sobs a little abating. "Come, it is not worth crying about—we shall be good friends when once we understand each other. I was obliged to speak out plainly, because it was necessary you should see that you have no power at all to prevent my marrying Miss Joyce, or anyone else whom I should think of. But now you know that, there is no necessity for our quarrelling, so let us shake hands and be friends."


He held out his hand as he spoke, and tried to take hers; but she, rolling them tightly in her shawl, shook herself away from him, as though

his touch was pollution, and looking him steadily in the face, answered,

"Don't think to come round me with your wanting to make friends, and that sort of stuff. I know you now for what you are, and there's no name bad enough for you! I can't expose you as I'd wish to, because you've wronged me so that my only safety is to hold my tongue; but remember this, there'll come a day of reckoning for you yet, as sure as your name's Grant; and perhaps then you'll be sorry you wouldn't let me stop you from doing more harm now."

"That's extremely likely," he replied. "When that day comes, I'll send and tell you. In the meantime, I wish to know how you came to find me out here."

"I gave that likeness I had of you to the police in Sydney, and told them to look out for some one like it. I said I thought my husband had run away from me, and not been lost in the bush, as was at first imagined, and that I should be glad to find him. I was put up to that plan by a milliner in Melbourne, who seemed to think, if you had left me and changed your name, you might be traced in that way. She was a sharp



customer, but uncommon pretty, and I followed her advice. A few days ago I was informed that Mr. Griffiths, Clerk of the Crown at B——, strongly resembled the portrait; and I came here accordingly to see if it could be you. On my arrival, I heard everyone talking of your approaching marriage with Miss Joyce; and, on seeing you, I determined to stop that anyhow. I am still determined to do so; and will even proclaim what I am, though I know it will be to my shame, unless you consent to give up this girl."

Griffiths frowned, and bit his lip. So then it was to Ethel he owed all this—he recognised her from Mrs. Grant's account; and it was to her suggestions he was indebted for this discovery. Mrs. Grant too enraged him. He had thought he had gained the victory over her—he remembered her so submissive and loving; and now it seemed she had some kind of principle in her, sufficient to prompt her to dare all for the sake of what she knew to be right. He was not going to give in so easily. He would see whether he could intimidate her into yielding this point; and with this intention he approached her threateningly.



"Look here," he said, in a low, stern whisper, "I am a dangerous man to cross in any plan I have taken into my head. You are here with me alone—I can easily make you keep silence for ever; and what is there to prevent my so doing? Swear that you will not breathe a word of this under any circumstances—swear!" he repeated; "if you do not, you have not five minutes longer to live!"

"I am not afraid," she answered, looking at him calmly, and without attempting to move. "I know you are wicked enough to kill me, if by so doing you could further your plans; but your servant let me come in to-night—he knows I am here now, and the only result of your acting so would be that you would swing for it. Therefore, I stick to what I said just now: you shall swear to me that you will break off this match with Miss Joyce, or I will publish to the world all I know; and though you may prove that you have betrayed me, you cannot prevent Mr. Joyce forbidding the marriage, as he certainly would do. I leave you your choice. Will you swear, or will you persist in going your own way?"

Beaten at every point, Griffiths glared at



Mrs. Grant, who, in spite of her plainness, at that moment looked almost heroic, so ennobled was her whole face and figure by the lofty earnestness of her manner.

"I suppose I must do as you require," he muttered at length—"you have the whip-hand of me, worse luck; but I'll pay you out some day if I live long enough, and till then I must wait in hope. What is it you wish me to do?"

"Swear to me—where is the book?—swear that you will not attempt to marry Miss Joyce, or any other woman, whilst either I or your first wife is alive. If you don't keep your oath, I am sure to hear of it, and then I will not spare you."

He swore as he was desired; and when he had done so, he continued—

"Now you must take your oath about something to me; and that is that, when you return to Sydney, you will inform the police there that, though the likeness is very remarkable, I am not your husband, Mr. Grant. Unless you do this, the bargain is all up between us."

She swore as directed; then rose and left, glad to get out of the house, and away from the presence of the man whom she now loath-

ed as much as she had once loved him. Returning to Sydney, she fulfilled her part of the engagement, by telling the police that Mr. Griffiths was not the person of whom she was in search; and satisfied now that her husband had really been lost, she would expend no more money in looking for him. She then returned to Victoria, to her old home at Ballarat, where her friends welcomed her gladly, and where she hoped, between their society and the solace of cookery, to outlive the bitter memories of the last few years.

Next day Griffiths, with downcast brow and loitering step, sought Mr. Joyce's house; he did not, according to custom, ask for the ladies, but inquired for the master, into whose presence he was immediately admitted.

"My dear fellow," said the prosperous colonist, shaking his visitor's hand warmly, "how is it that I have the pleasure of your company to-day?—the ladies generally manage to monopolise you. But you are not looking yourself—what is the matter? I must scold Sophy for not taking proper care of you."

"For mercy's sake, sir, don't mention her name!" said Griffiths, with an expression of

such real distress in his countenance that Joyce at once saw something was wrong, and became grave on the instant.

"Sit down and tell me what has happened," he said, motioning his visitor to a chair. "I hope nothing wrong in your new business."

"No, indeed, that's all right," he answered, with a sigh. "I wish it was that which was wrong instead of what it is. I did not tell you all my early history, when I asked you for your daughter the other day, Mr. Joyce, and I was wrong not to do so. However, it would have made no difference in what I have now to say. When I was quite a lad, I married a woman much beneath me in social position, and afterwards, as was natural, very bitterly repented my folly. I left her almost immediately; she had money enough to support herself, and I never intended to go near her again. Not long after I had left her I heard she had died, and ever since then I have regarded myself as a free man. It was so painful an episode in my life, that I never liked to recall it even in thought, and, believing there was no necessity for doing so, did not mention it to you the other day. Yesterday, however, after I left this, I met a

person who told me that I had been misinformed, that my wife is alive and well, and that she keeps herself informed as to all my movements, so that if by any chance I, thinking her dead, should venture to marry again, she would at once come down on me and ruin all my prospects in life. Am I not to be pitied, sir, being so near gaining the desire of my heart, and then seeing it snatched from me in this manner?"

As he spoke he buried his face in his hands, and groaned with well feigned wretchedness. To say the truth, he lamented losing a fine property and good connection greatly. The woman pleased him also, but then he had been unfortunate with women, and as far as she was concerned, he could have managed to do without her; but this Mr. Joyce did not know, and the young man's misery touched him.

"Come," he said kindly, laying his hand on Griffiths's shoulder; "be a man, and don't give way. It's as hard a case as ever I heard, and Sophy will feel it dreadfully, but it's a great mercy you were told in time—it would have been a dreadful thing had matters gone any further. Now it can all drop through quietly, and as nothing has as yet been settled, it will

be easy to contradict any reports that may have got afloat. I'm very sorry for you, my dear boy, but it's well it's no worse. You'd better not see Sophy. I'll tell her about it, and don't you think I shall be one bit the less your friend for all this. You have acted an honourable part in coming at once to tell me, and whenever I can in any way be of service to you, I will remember you and push you forward."

"You are too kind," murmured Griffiths, raising a face that had really rather a haggard, woe-begone expression, caused chiefly by a pair of very red eyes, that had been sedulously rubbed with his knuckles for a few minutes, and by a general, dishevelled appearance about the hair.

"I suppose I had better be off now," he continued. "I'm afraid every minute she may come in."

To this Mr. Joyce readily assented. He was sorry for Griffiths, whom he thought a fine young fellow, rather hardly used by circumstances; but knowing as he now did what those circumstances were, he was keenly alive to the extreme undesirability of his daughter's meeting the young man, or having anything further

to say to him—even a parting scene was not a thing to be admitted, if Griffiths could be got out of the house before she was aware he was in it; and knowing that his daughter was what might be mildly described as extremely unconventional, Mr. Joyce was doubtful to what lengths her grief might carry her. He saw his friend off, therefore, by the back way, and only began to breathe freely when the ring of his horse's feet died away in the distance. Then he went in to his wife, to confide to her the task of breaking the news to Sophy.

"I'm sure I don't know how she'll take it," he continued, when he had detailed what he had just heard. "She seemed so bent on having him."

"Bless you, John, what are you thinking of?" cried his wife. "I should hope Sophy is not a girl; who would be likely to take on about a thing of this kind? She can't have him, so she'll take the next best, that's all; and I daresay she'll think the change rather amusing. 'Variety is charming' is her motto, and you needn't expect to see her breaking her heart, either about him or anybody else."

"I'm sure I'm glad to hear it," replied her

father, "for I was afraid she might try to insist on marrying him, in spite of everything."

"Indeed, she's quite capable of doing so, if it suited her; but she's sharp enough to know it would not be at all what she'd like, and her romance is always in subjection to her comfort, so you need not fear what she may do. But perhaps you'd better if you can get the man some appointment that may keep him out of the town a little for a while."

Mrs. Joyce's idea of her daughter's courage and self-control proved to be the right one; for, on the news being communicated to her, though for a moment her face turned pale and her lip quivered, the next minute she looked up with a laugh and said:

"Well, nobody shall say I'm breaking my heart about him or any other man. I shall be just as good friends with him as before, but I'll go in for young Hamilton now; it's time I thought about getting married soon, and he's the next best of the lot."

"Quite right, my dear," said her mother, approvingly; "and Hamilton is a far better match; so perhaps, after all, things are better as they are than as we had planned them."



Sophy didn't quite think so, as she stood before her glass, fastening some flowers into her hair that evening. She would have liked very much to have everything go the way she had wished, but she was not a soft-hearted fool, she said to herself, to sigh after impossibilities. That man was not to be had, but there were plenty of others that were obtainable, and to catch one of those was now her business. But as to avoiding Griffiths because she couldn't marry him, she had no notion of doing that, and so she should tell him the next time she saw him.

She did see him again before long, for he knew playing too despondent a part would excite contempt, and not the sympathy he desired to obtain; he went everywhere, therefore, as usual, and a day or two afterwards met Miss Joyce at a picnic. Not knowing how she took the matter, he at first avoided her; but presently she beckoned him over to her, and made him sit down beside her, in a retired nook she had selected for herself, and where she had been holding a little court, until her marked desire for a *tête-à-tête* with the handsome Police Inspector drove her other admirers away.

"Now we are alone," she began, "I want you

to tell me all about this business. I suppose it's really as bad as I have been given to understand, and that there's no way of getting round it."

He looked at her in astonishment. Certainly, of all the women he had yet met, this was the most curious type. Her perfect composure, and the business-like manner in which she questioned him about his wife, and his future plans with regard to her, so dumbfounded him that he answered her clearly and plainly, without remonstrance or attempt to evade her cross-examination, taking good care the while to stick to the story he had composed for her father. When she had heard all that could be told on the subject, Sophy Joyce looked at him with a sigh, saying,

"The game's up, then, I suppose?"

"What game?" he asked, too bewildered to understand her meaning.

"Why, our game, of course. The game we were to have played together, and which the fates have forbidden our attempting in company. It's a bore, I must say; I shall have to look out for some one else, and I don't mind saying I see no one here I like half as well as you, and you'll have to defer all thoughts of anything of the

kind until Madame G—— takes herself off to another sphere, for which I should think you will not feel much sorrow."

For a moment Griffiths was staggered ; then, reflecting that the best way to meet a woman of this kind was to be as outspoken with her as she was with him, he replied,

"You are right ; but whenever that happy release comes, it will be too late for me, as you will already be lost to me. I am not flattering you when I say that I have never before, and I daresay never shall again, meet anyone at all approaching you in outspoken frankness."

"A quality that shocked you not a little at first. No, you needn't deny it. I saw by your face you imagined I was mad. But I'm not worse than you or anyone else, only you think that kind of thing, and I say them aloud. I'm going in for young Hamilton in your place—a poor choice, certainly, but the best I could make under the circumstances."

"He's not a bad fellow, I believe, and you'll have pretty much your own way with him. I say, here's your mother coming to look after you. She thinks you're taking up with me again, in spite of all you know against me."

"Very likely," answered the young lady, nonchalantly. "Now, mamma, what do you want?" she continued, as that lady came up. "I know very well you think I'm devoting too much time to this wolf in sheep's clothing," pushing Griffiths with her parasol as she spoke; "but you know we understand each other, so there's no harm in our flirting, if it pleases us."

"But, my dear girl, consider," remonstrated her mother, sitting down beside them, while the young man looked from one to the other, divided between astonishment and amusement. "You keep other eligible beaux away by devoting such exclusive attention to Mr. Griffiths, who I am sure will pardon my speaking thus before him."

"Perhaps I had better leave," said Griffiths, preparing to rise, "and allow you to talk the matter over together."

"Oh! dear, no!—don't stir!" cried Sophy, laying her hand on his arm to prevent his rising. "It will be so much more amusing if we talk it over with you—quite an original idea, and one I am sure you will appreciate."

"It is something out of the common way," he answered, sinking into his former lazy atti-

tude. "You can ask my opinion of the rival candidates, and, as I know them all pretty well, I'll promise to give you my advice about them most impartially."

"Really you two are incorrigible," sighed Mrs. Joyce, rising. "I see my presence only makes you worse, and that nothing I can say will teach you wisdom, Sophy; so I'll leave you to yourselves, and let you manage your own affairs."

With which wise speech Mrs. Joyce walked away, her mind quite made up on one point, and that was that Mr. Joyce must get Griffiths out of the place for a time. She told him so that evening, and he answered that he would very willingly do so, if he could thereby benefit the young man, for whom he felt both liking and esteem.

"There's the Gold Commissionership at Green Creek," he observed, "and it would not be a bad thing for him. He could not hold it and his present post together, I think, and it would keep him a good part of the time up there."

"The very thing!" cried Mrs. Joyce. "Get it for him, by all means, and let him go off as soon as possible."

“ Well, I’ll talk to a few of our friends about it, and see what can be done. I only heard this evening the place was vacant, so I suppose we shall be the first to stir in the matter, and I daresay may succeed in getting it for him.”

In due course the appointment was procured for him, and he became Gold Commissioner at Green Creek, and Chief Magistrate for that district, that being always one of the duties of the position. He was greatly pleased with his advance, for it was an increase of pay on his former post, and also gave him the highest rank in the new settlement. It is true there was not much society in which his position was a matter of any consequence, in a newly opened up diggers’ camp ; and at first he found it desperately dull, though he had plenty to do, marking out claims, settling disputes, and judging cases that came under the power of the law. But it was not at all the kind of life he wished for, and several times he was inclined to throw it up, and trust once more to the mercy of his friends for support, when a fresh influx of population arrived, and amongst them many men of the stamp he had been accustomed to meet,

who, attracted by the report of the vast riches of these diggings, intended settling on the spot, as long as there should be a prospect of making any money.

Under these changed circumstances, Griffiths found matters not so bad as they were at first, and he speedily began to get reconciled to his new quarters—the more so as he sometimes took an opportunity of running down to B—and spending a few days with his old friends there, never failing at such times to call on Mr. and Mrs. Joyce and their daughter, who, though now engaged to Mr. Hamilton, and about shortly to be married, continued as much his friend as ever. The first time she met him after he had been appointed to his new office, she exclaimed,

“Well, you see, they were determined to put a stop to our friendship, and they’ve done it pretty effectually by exiling you to Green Creek. A horrid hole I should think it was, from all I hear; and I’m sure you don’t know how to get on without me.”

“It isn’t very lively,” he answered; “and I do believe that, though I am not a very sentimental person, any more than yourself, the

sound of your voice and a sight of your bright face now and then would make it a great deal more endurable to me."

"Bother that woman!—it was hard lines her turning up just then!" exclaimed Sophy, impetuously. "I get on very well, as you see, but sometimes I should like to shake my little *fiancé*, to try and get a few ideas out of him. He has but two in the world—one of them intense jealousy of you, and the other equally intense admiration of myself; both which ideas, carried to the lengths he carries them, become monotonous, and bore me insufferably."

"What would he say if he saw me here now?" asked Griffiths, with a laugh. They were sitting in the drawing-room at Mr. Joyce's place, Prospect Park, and were enjoying a quiet hour to themselves, as Mrs. Joyce had gone out to drive, quite unconscious of the advent of such a visitor in her absence.

Sophy shrugged her shoulders.

"I'm sure I don't know what he'd say or do either, but it would be something extravagant. The other night we were at a dance at the Pearces', and I suppose I had danced or talked too much to some one—a Mr. Kent, I think,



who, when we were coming away, came with us to the cloak-room, and was about to put my cloak over my shoulders, when George Hamilton snatched it from him, and throwing it on the ground, jumped and danced on it in a perfect frenzy of passion. I went into fits of laughter, mamma screamed; and the more I laughed and she screamed, the more frantic he became, until some of the other men got round him and stopped him. Of course, as you may imagine, I wasn't going to wear the cloak after that. I turned the skirt of my silk dress over my shoulders, and went home in that fashion. He wanted to apologise very humbly next day, but I told him not to do so on any account—if he had no objection to making an idiot of himself in public, I certainly did not care about it. Indeed, I had been rather amused than otherwise,—it was a long time since I had had so hearty a laugh.”

“Rather a dangerous sort of man to marry, I should fancy,” observed Griffiths. “Suppose he should take to venting his anger upon you, instead of on your clothes?”

“Why, don't you remember, he's the little fellow, the smallest of the whole family? I'd

be more than a match for him if he dared touch me; but he knows better than that. I should box his ears and send him to bed without his supper. After all, I daresay I shall be better off than if I'd married you—you would have been able to bully me if you had wished to do so."

After one of these visits to B——, Griffiths, on his return, would again find the Commissioner's camp very dull for awhile; but as the society increased, and he got more accustomed to his life, he began to create a circle of his own, which, if it was composed of the best men to be met at the diggings, was not necessarily composed of the steadiest.

## CHAPTER IV.

WHILE all these events were passing in Australia, far across the seas, in her quiet English home Clara Singleton was bearing her lot with the fortitude that might be expected from a woman of her character. To the eye of the world she was little altered—her smile was perhaps not quite so radiant and sunny as it once was, and her merry jests were not of as frequent occurrence as formerly; but still they were distributed with tolerable frequency, and in them, to unobservant eyes, there was no trace of the trial through which she had passed. Slingsby often asserted that Miss Singleton was graver and more melancholy than she used to be; but he was laughed at for his pains, and at length kept his observations on that score to himself. He had at last attained the height of his ambition—namely, to know her, and be ad-

mitted constantly into her society ; and perhaps some secret understanding between two hearts, each a prey to a hopeless attachment, made them more friendly with each other than, under different circumstances, would have been the case.

At any rate, Clara felt that with Slingsby it was not necessary for her always to wear the mask of a gaiety she did not feel ; that she might, at times, talk of serious things, and speak of serious thoughts to him, in a way that would not be understood by others ; and she had a firm conviction that he would not mistake her meaning, nor take advantage of her confidence. And she was right ; the young man had somehow obtained an insight into her mind that led him to perceive that his love was never more hopeless than now, when she was so perfectly friendly and open with him. She regarded him as a friend simply, and, as far as he could see, there was no chance of that friendship ever ripening into anything else. It seemed to him as if her mind was one in which the capacity for love had no place—and yet how it should be so he could not conceive. It was as though, when she had been formed, she had been endowed with every requisite for being a good

and true friend both to those of her own sex and of the other also, without the power of ever changing that feeling into love having been imparted to her. He could not understand it, nor could her mother either, who often talked over the matter with her brother, saying how troublesome it was that Clara would take a fancy to no one, and wondering what would happen to her when she was gone.

"If you and I both go, William," she would say, "she has no relative in the world left, but my half-brother out in Australia. She would have to go to him—I'm sure he would be kind to her; he has often asked us to go to him before, but still I don't think she'd care to live out in that wild country."

"It would not be as bad to her as it would be to you," answered Colonel Langham, quietly; "indeed, I think change would be good for her. She seems to me not quite as merry as she used to be; she's getting something sedate and old-maidish about her I never remarked before. However, I hope you will long be able to take care of her; and as for me, I think I have many years of life before me yet, so you need not fret at her not marrying as soon as

you might have wished. She seems contented with her mode of life, and if she is, it is a pity for her to change it for one in which she might not be as happy."

In this way her relations and friends viewed Clara's character, ignorant of the conflict that day by day went on within her. To many it would seem that, knowing her love hopeless, and being far separated from the man for whom she had cared, and who had deceived her, she ought by this time to have become reconciled to her fate, and be, if not happy, at least undisturbed by struggles between her nature and her will.

But she had never put off her armour for a moment—had, ever since her wound, been living in the eye of the world, unable to lay down her arms and give way to the natural impulse of her loving woman's nature. Had she been able to do so—had she been able to weep the wild, passionate tears that weighed so heavy on her brain—had she been able to mourn with all the strength of her strong, wild heart over the hopes that had been blighted so early, over the day-dreams that had faded so quickly, she might, when she had exhausted her grief, have

risen, wiped her eyes, and taken up her burden again, with a brave resolution not to look back on a blighted past. But just because she had never laid aside her self-control, because it had been her companion night and day since first she knew she had been deceived, so now it had become a load heavier almost than she could bear, under which she feared greatly she should some day stumble and fall, laying bare to the pity and sympathy she so much dreaded, the wound she had been dealt in the battle of life, and the knowledge of which she had so jealously guarded from even those nearest and dearest to her. For there was one point in this struggle in which we are all engaged that was well known to her, and in which it differs from mortal strife with mortal powers;—it is that, whereas in the battle-field he who falls fighting amongst his fellows receives praise, pity, reverence, never blame; in this other arena, when the human heart has been wounded to the death, there are always more voices raised in censure of the stricken one than those who champion the sufferer's cause, and their clamour overpowers the friendly accents of the minority.

All this Clara knew, having learnt it intui-


tively, as most women do learn these great truths of the heart; and the knowledge of this it was that compelled her to bear, with aching weary brain, the secret that touched her happiness so closely.

But as time wore on other trials and sorrows were added to her lot—trials that took her thoughts off from herself, though adding heavily to the load of grief she had to bear. Her mother's health began to fail; slowly and surely Clara saw that she was leaving her, that soon she should be alone in the world, except for her uncle, and that the dear, kind face she remembered from her earliest years would be present with her no more. Often when alone in her room this thought would flash across her mind, a cruel pang would dart through her, and she would feel as if life was too hard on her, and that when this tie was gone she must give up the battle altogether. Even in this sorrow she could not give way to grief, she could not ease her brain by the facile tears given to some natures. There was a stern principle of unyielding resistance to weakness, hidden somewhere in her slight frame, that made her brace herself into a more unbending mood, the more impera-



tive it became for her that the strain on her mind should be relaxed. She would rise at night and sit mute and tearless on her bed, rocking herself to and fro in a dumb agony, as she thought of the separation before her, and how soon that inevitable parting must come. If sometimes a remembrance of her own selfish grief, of the happy hopes that had been shattered, crossed her mind, she turned away from the theme with a shudder. It seemed to her that she had too long and too blindly been absorbed in self; she had too long devoted herself to her secret sorrow, and this rude awakening, this grief which must be public and patent to all, was her punishment.

Day by day, as she watched her mother fading slowly before her, she forced back the tears that rose to her eyes, murmuring, there will be time enough for them when she is gone—time enough, and too much, she felt. It often seemed to her that life was too long, and the happiness in it too small, for it to be a desirable gift to anyone. Only that she believed in the goodness and wisdom of God, and knew that after death all things should be made plain, she would have been sorely tried at this time in attempting to understand his dealings towards her.



Yet even with this confidence, her mortal spirit shrank sorely from the trial in store for her, and still more for her uncle's sake than her own. She saw it all so clearly, she could watch it coming, and prepare herself to meet it; but he did not seem to understand what was approaching, and looked forward to Summer as sure to bring fresh health and strength to his sister. They had been very united, those two; and Clara knew what a blow it would be to him when he should first understand they must part. He was not in strong health himself, and she dreaded the effect the shock would have upon him; but she dared not tell him what she feared. She lived hoping he might come to discover it himself, that the truth would dawn upon him gradually, and that he would not therefore suffer so much from it as she dreaded; yet day by day, while her mother's life faded away, he remained unconscious of the change approaching.

Mrs. Singleton herself was well aware of her state, and something in her daughter's face and manner convinced her she knew also, though they had never as yet conversed upon the subject.

One afternoon, however, when she was weaker than usual, and felt that the end could not be very far off, Mrs. Singleton determined to speak to Clara, and advise her what she should do when her mother was gone.

"Clara, love," she said feebly, as the girl sat in a dejected attitude by her bedside, "I see that you understand my situation, and know that I have not long to be with you. Let us talk about it a little, darling; I have much to say to you before I go."

Clara stooped and kissed her mother.

"I am ready to hear what you have to say, mamma dear," she replied, "but don't say more than you can help about leaving me. I cannot bear it."

"I will not mention it if I can avoid it," answered the invalid; then, after a pause, she continued, in her faint voice, "My child, I wish I could have seen you married before I went. How was it that you never fancied any of those who loved you?"

"I do not know," she replied, hesitating painfully; then, burying her face in the pillow by her mother's, she whispered, "I can't keep anything from you now, mamma, though I would

never have told you while you were well and strong, but when you are leaving me, and will soon know all, I cannot deceive you. I cared for some one once, and he amused himself with my liking and left me. I have no second love in my heart for any man, and I will not marry without it."


"My poor 'child," answered Mrs. Singleton, laying her wasted hand on her daughter's head, "and I never guessed it! How little we know of what goes on in the hearts of those around us! I thought you so bright, so happy, so free from care. But who was it, my darling? He must have been worth little himself who did not value you."

"Don't ask me, dear," replied Clara, raising her head, and masking herself once more in her old armour of coldness and self-disdain, "I could not tell you that; and as to what he was worth, say rather what a fool I was to give my heart away to one who I might have seen was not in earnest. That's the misery and the shame of it—that I should have known better, should have read him more clearly. Let us talk of something else, mamma. You know now why I have never married, and why I

never will marry. Tell me what else you have to say that you wish me to hear."

"It is very bad, my child, that matters should be so with you. I have always hoped that some day you might have a home of your own, where you would be safe when I and your uncle leave you; but now that hope is over, and I want to tell you what I would wish you to do for him. As long as it is possible keep with him; as long as you can, follow him everywhere; but should circumstances arise to separate you—and in a soldier's life that is possible—or should you lose him too, remember your uncle in Australia—to him I should wish you to go—he I know will be kind to you, and will love you for my sake. He is wealthy, and has a wife and only daughter. Here is his address—don't lose it; and if ever you want a friend, write to him, and tell him it was my dying wish that you should apply to him for assistance."

In spite of her self-control, and though no sob was heard, nor quivering shook her frame, large silent tears rolled down Clara's cheeks. She had not dared to weep, for fear of agitating or distressing her mother; but nature would



have its way, and down her calm, marble cheeks, from her wide-open eyes, the tears chased each other slowly, falling in large drops, unheeded, into her lap, and on her burning, unconscious hands. No sound escaped her, and the invalid beside whose bed she sat did not know she was weeping till she felt that the hand stretched out to take the address was wet with the heavy drops that had fallen on it. Then she perceived what was the matter, and tried to soothe her daughter with loving words.

"Be calm, my child," she said—"it is but for a little while; and it pains me to see you grieve so."

"I am calm—I am indeed," answered Clara, awakening as out of a reverie. "Have I been crying?" she added, seeing the tears on her hand, and smearing the paper she held. "I did not know I had been so foolish, and will try not to be so in future. But, mother, don't talk to me thus again—I cannot hear you!—it breaks my heart!"

A few days after this conversation took place, Mrs. Singleton was dead, and Clara was an orphan, still bearing up for her uncle's sake, and fighting against nature, for the time when

she might give way had not yet come. As long as he should need from her support and consolation, she must give it; after he no longer wanted her help, she might indulge her tears in secret; she might give way to the utter weariness, the heart-breaking trouble, that was becoming too heavy a burden for her strength to bear. People said she was breaking her heart in silence, and so she was—it could be seen in the white still face, in the rigid, unchanging expression, in the wasting of the once beautiful form, in the even, dull tone of her once-ringing voice. She went about her business as usual; she talked to those who came to see her with patient politeness, but a smile dawned on her features never; no brightness came to her eye; no tone of interest to her voice. It seemed that her body lived, but that her soul had left its earthly habitation. She resembled a beautiful automaton. The only one who did not perceive this change was the man for whom she lived, for whom she went through her daily duties, when it would have been so much easier for her to lie down and die. He thought that she was much as usual; but his own grief rendered him unobservant of any trouble in others.

Only, as time wore on, and his sorrow began to abate, he remarked that she was quieter than she had been formerly—that was all. Quieter! when never laughter came to her lips, nor mirth into her heart. Those around said she would follow her mother shortly, if something did not happen to rouse her from the state of lethargy into which she was falling. The something that was requisite to rouse her came before it was too late, in the orders for Colonel Langham and his regiment to proceed to New Zealand, where the Maori war was at that time being carried on, and where, to the surprise of the colonists, the appointments of modern warfare did not obtain for the whites the easy victory they had anticipated.

It became necessary now that Clara should follow her mother's dying injunctions, and write to her other uncle. She told Colonel Langham what she was about to do, and he approved her decision. In the meanwhile, until the answer to her letter should arrive, it was agreed she should go to her friend Mrs. Chetwynd, and according to the reply she received from Australia her after-conduct would be regulated. She looked for the slip of paper



on which her mother had written the address, and after a long hunt found it in one of her drawers. On it was written "John Joyce, Esq., Prospect Park, B——, Queensland." To him she wrote, and then took her departure for Brighton; whilst her uncle, almost cheered up by the prospect of active service, set out with his regiment to New Zealand.

"Goodness knows whether we shall be kept out there long, or whether I shall ever see you again," he said, as he bade her good-bye; "if we remain out, I will see about your coming to me again; but at present I can form no plans. I daresay, though," he added, "you will like Queensland, and John Joyce's family, and be very happy there. I don't think I ever saw him—he went out while I was quite small; but I believe he's a good sort of fellow, and very well off; though, as far as money is concerned, I'll take care you don't want for that."

"They can never, never be the same to me as you are," she sobbed. "How I wish I could go with you!" But this was not possible, and, as before said, she went to Brighton, whilst the Colonel set out for the South.

With what feverish impatience she counted the



weeks and months that elapsed before she could hope to hear from Australia; even all the glories of Mr. Chetwynd's new yacht, still so called, though it had been in use for about three years, could not calm her troubled spirit, or render her contented in the uncertainty in which she lived. Besides, the sea and the yachting reminded her of a time she would fain forget—of a time she had almost forgotten, so completely had her new griefs occupied her mind, until this again reminded her of the days when she first knew that she loved, and doubted whether she was wise in so doing. Sometimes her lively little friend Beatrice, still lively, though she was now a married woman of several years' standing, would try to rouse her out of her sadness. "Grief at such a loss is natural," she would say, when told by her husband to let the girl alone, "but her grief is unnatural and excessive; you would think there was no other hope for her in life than the mother who is dead. She must marry, as other girls do, and then she will cease to mourn for what is the inevitable lot of all children—namely, to see their parents die, and live on themselves, in spite of their sorrow."

She hinted something of this kind to the girl

herself, who turned on her passionately, saying,

“Don’t talk to me of marriage or comfort! I shall never marry, and comfort by such means is not for me. Time will bring more peace, no doubt, but death is the only real solace.”

This answer was so different from Clara’s former character that Mrs. Chetwynd was frightened, and in future did leave her friend alone on that subject, as her husband had advised her, only trying to draw her out of herself by quiet, unobtrusive means, and succeeding gradually in bringing back a more placid look to her white, sad face.

Time rolled by, and at length one morning an Australian letter arrived. With great eagerness Clara seized it, and tore it open; it was short and to the point:—

“MY DEAR NIECE,

“I cannot tell you how grieved I was to hear of your mother, my dear sister’s, death. Though it is now many years since I have seen her, her memory is still fresh in my mind; and even had it not been her wish you should come to us, you would always have been welcome here for her sake. Come to us as soon

as you receive this ; my wife and daughter are equally anxious with myself to have you with us. I do not know how you are supplied with money, but, as your travelling expenses on so long a journey must be heavy, accept the enclosed bank-bill from me to help you on your way. Your best plan is to come to Sydney, where I will meet you and bring you on here.

“Your affectionate uncle,

“JOHN JOYCE.”

“What a kind letter !” she exclaimed joyfully, when she had glanced over it. “Read it, Beatrice, and see,” she added, looking at the bank post-bill enclosed. “He has sent me one hundred and fifty pounds for my travelling expenses ; but indeed I don’t want that, Uncle William gives me as much as I require. What shall I do with it ?”


“Do with it !” laughed Beatrice. “Why, I should say it would be very useful. Mind, you have not only to pay your passage, which is sure to cost a good deal, but you have also to get your outfit for the voyage ; and you must remember one wants a good stock of clothing for a twelve or fourteen weeks’ passage.”

"I suppose so ; I had forgotten that. Now, Mr. Chetwynd, I shall have to trouble you to find out about the sailing of the ships for me, and I must ask you to take a cabin for me, and see that everything is got ready. I am afraid I shall give you a good deal of work, but I really don't know what to do, or how to do it myself, so I must have recourse to you."

"I shall be delighted to be of service to you, I'm sure," answered Chetwynd ; " or, at least, I would, if it was not for the purpose of sending you away. But tell me when you wish to go, as I must see what ships are sailing at that time."

"I think I had better leave the beginning of next month," she answered, "if any vessels sail then. I shall have almost a month to get my things, and that will be plenty of time, as I can get them all here."

Of course there was considerable lamentation on Beatrice Chetwynd's part, and many attempts to induce her to stay one month more ; but Clara felt that she had already trespassed too long on their kindness, and she adhered to her first resolution of leaving next month. A ship was found that seemed to suit admirably,



both as to time of sailing, and in the number and class of the passengers, as far as that could be ascertained by reference to the captain, who had seen some of them when they came on board to look after the fitting up of their cabins. As to the Captain himself, he was a good-humoured, gentlemanly, middle-aged man, with a quiet manner, underneath which lay a strong vein of humour, and a considerable appreciation of the ludicrous. He was a married man with a family, and some one or other of his daughters generally accompanied him, his wife remaining on shore to take charge of the rest of the family. To this man's charge Clara was specially confided, an arrangement which she had no reason to regret, as he devoted himself very much to her comfort, and procured her many little indulgences that she would otherwise have gone without.

For the first few days after she said farewell to her kind friends, and found herself all alone among strangers, she was very lonely. But, though feeling her isolation, the whole thing was so new to her, it was such a complete change of scene, that her sorrow was diverted, and her mind became more cheerful than it had

been since her mother's death. Even the intense discomfort that she felt at first, when at meals everything would upset over her, and run into her lap, or when she would be thrown violently against the bulkhead in attempting to dress in the morning—even these petty annoyances exercised a beneficial effect on her spirits, and she became stronger and brighter day by day.


The voyage sped by, as an ocean voyage will, in intense monotony for the most part, but a monotony that was pleasant to one so tried and wearied as Clara had been. Little by little, though she knew it not, the freedom from care and worry, the constant sight of new faces, the hearing of unfamiliar topics of conversation, were drawing her mind away from the morbid track into which it had fallen, and was bringing it to a more healthful tone. She could laugh now at the Captain's quiet drollery, or make remarks on the odd manners of some of their circle at the saloon table; she could even make herself agreeable to the gentlemen, with a bland unconsciousness that one or two silly moths were fast trying to singe their wings in what she would have considered the very dim light of her

farthing rushlight. But though she was really and truly unconscious of it, it was the case. Mr. Norton, the son of one of the largest squatters in New South Wales, who had been sent to England to finish his education, and who was returning to his mother country, primed with even a larger amount of conceit than was natural to him, was one of the first to go down before her; and she, who regarded him as a mere child in comparison with her sedate age, treated him with a calm, unvarying kindness that might have led him to form great hopes of her liking for him, had it not been that she behaved with similar gentle, equable good-nature to Mr. Hertford, a young fellow who was going out to set up sheep-farming, about which he knew as much as that respectable individual, the man in the moon, may be supposed to do.

The attentions of these two young men would have kept Clara very well supplied with amusement, even had there been no other people on board; but there were a good many others besides these, and the different types of character presented in the passengers interested her very much. There were one or two sober, sedate couples, who had come home to leave



their children at school ; there was a bride and bridegroom on their wedding trip ; there were gentlemen who did not feel inclined to indulge in the chronic ship flirtation ; and there were young ladies and young gentlemen who did go in for that occupation or amusement, whichever it may be called, besides the two who were so devoted to Clara. For a long time she did not at all understand the meaning of their constant attendance upon her. Mr. Norton was the most confident of the two, and never could be made to see when his company was not wanted. Often when Hertford would come to ask Miss Singleton to walk with him, as soon as they began their measured tramp up and down the deck, Norton would appear on her other side, monopolize the conversation, and finally drive Hertford away, considering himself greatly ill-used, and thinking that Miss Singleton showed very bad taste in preferring the other man to him. The truth was, she did not do so ; but as the young man always would run away whenever Norton made his appearance, it was not easy for her to show any preference for his society. Wherever she went, when she sat down, or when she walked, one or other of them was always



by her. Providentially, she had her books and her work, or she might have got rather bored by this ; but it did not seem necessary to either of her young admirers' views that she should always talk to them ; they appeared to feel equally happy if allowed to bring their books and read beside her, at which times she could entertain herself in a similar way. It was all so quiet and matter-of-fact that Clara never dreamed it was anything more than a general liking for ladies' society which the young men evinced, and not a particular partiality for her.

The first intimation she had of anything of the kind was one day when Miss Phillips, a pretty girl who was carrying on a violent flirtation with one of the other passengers, came into her cabin, and began laughing about the different love-affairs going on on board ; and as the number she named seemed more than Clara had noticed, she asked innocently,

"How do you make out five ? I only know of three."

"Come, don't try to put me off that way," answered Miss Phillips. "What do you think

of yourself and Mr. Norton—or, better still, yourself and Mr. Hertford?”

“What nonsense you talk!” replied Clara, laughing. “Those boys are mere babies compared with me, and, moreover, are not in any way interested in me.”

“Then why are they always stuck up to your elbows? No one else can ever get near you to speak to you for a minute, unless one goes down to your cabin, as I do.”

“I think they like talking to a lady, and all the others are occupied as you describe, except myself and the elderly married women; naturally they prefer a young woman to an old one.”

“Don’t be so sure they’d do that, if conversation and society merely were their objects. Many old women talk well,” laughed Miss Phillips; “besides, I am sure Mr. Hertford is the worst of the two, and I heard Mrs. Rainsworth saying to Mrs. Egan yesterday that he would propose for you soon, if you didn’t take care.”

“She’s a horrid old gossip!” answered Clara, more viciously than was at all usual to her. “Why, the mere idea is absurd! I must be at least three or four years older than he is, and I

am very sure the poor boy would be quite as much annoyed as I am if he knew of what he is suspected."


"Fiddle-de-dee! you simple-minded girl!" replied the other. "Watch him, and see if it isn't as I say, though, of course, you can't watch him as a looker-on can, because he hardly ever takes his eyes off you, and it would be embarrassing if you were to try and look at him under those circumstances. I wonder what will happen when we leave the ship? Shall we any of us see each other again? Of course, when you marry, you'll come to Sydney to spend the honeymoon, if you don't do the deed with young Mr. Hertford as soon as you get there, as I think likely; and if I'm at home when you come, you shall pay me a visit."

"Don't expect ever to hear of my marrying," answered Clara, rather shortly, "as I warn you you will, in that case, only be disappointed." So saying, she left the cabin, and went on deck. Her curiosity was excited to watch the conduct of the two young men about whom they had just been speaking, and she could not help noticing that, no sooner had she seated herself, and taken up her work, than they both moved

towards her, with the intention of sitting down beside her.

Hertford was the furthest off, and consequently did not reach the spot till Norton was already seated. He looked very savage, fidgeted about near them for awhile, made several disagreeable remarks, and finally walked off to a little distance, where he leaned against the taffrail, and glared at them with the most vindictive expression.

At this minute Miss Phillips's eye caught Clara's fixed on her with a knowing glance, that she did not in the least understand. For far from thinking Mr. Hertford in love with her, she thought he did not particularly like her, in spite of his constant attention—he had just now been really rude once or twice, and his manner of scowling at her, as he was doing at that minute, was very unpleasant. She turned away her head to avoid seeing it, and began to talk to young Norton, who was not nearly so pleasant a companion as Hertford, being inclined to think a great deal too much of himself, but who certainly did not seem so easily put out of temper. After she had been talking to him for a few minutes, an irresistible influence caused her



to glance again towards where she had last seen the other young man. He was there still, but looking so lonely and unutterably miserable that her soft heart pitied him. He had turned his back to them, and was gazing into the sea; but as she looked, he turned suddenly, and their eyes met. "Poor fellow!" she thought, "I wonder what's gone wrong with him—he looks so wretched. I'll see if he'll come over here and talk—perhaps it will cheer him up a little." Full of this kind idea, she smiled in answer to his look, and made him a sign that he might come over and sit beside her. As he perceived her sign, his whole countenance lightened up, and he came to her quickly, looking just as happy as he had before looked the reverse.

"Won't you sit with us, Mr. Hertford?" she asked when he came near. "You looked so lonely over there, all by yourself."

"I thought you didn't want me," he answered; "and that's why I didn't come before."

"No more we did want you," replied Norton, angrily. "We got on very well without you; and you know the old proverb, 'Two's company, three's none.'"

"A proverb I don't at all agree with," answered Clara, quickly, seeing that for some reason these two were inclined to quarrel. "Do be good children," she continued, "and don't snap at each other that way, or you'll make me wish I was not sitting between you."

"Well, I'm going to smoke, so I shan't be in the way much longer," replied Norton, crossly; and so saying, he got up and left them.

As soon as he was gone, Hertford, after a little hesitation, asked,

"Are you sorry he has gone, Miss Singleton? For if you are, I'll go away, and he'll come back."

"No, please don't do that," she answered. "Why should you think I'd rather have him to talk to than you?"

"I'm sure you would," he said—"he's always with you; even when I ask you to walk with me, or to sit with me, he comes and puts himself into the party, so of course you must like him best."

"What outrageous nonsense you do talk!" she replied, laughing. "He makes himself one of the party because he chooses to do it, and not because I want him. I have no objection

to his doing it, because there is another proverb that matches the one he told you just now, and that is, 'The more the merrier.'"

"I hate him!" cried Hertford, grinding his teeth with bitter emphasis. "He has no business to be always poking his face in where it isn't wanted. I don't do it to him, and he has no business to do so to me."

"I thought he was a friend of yours," Clara answered. "I am sure you told me, the first day we were on board, that he was the only person you knew."

"Yes, I knew him before, but I don't know that I ever liked him very much; and now I hate him! Don't you know the reason?" he asked, looking up into her face suddenly.

A curious sensation of uneasiness rushed through Clara's mind at this question. What could this young man mean? She almost thought it might be as Miss Phillips had said.

"I don't know," she answered shortly, taking up the work she had laid down while speaking to him, and going on with it nervously.

He glanced round the deck hurriedly, and his manner struck Clara again as being very singular—it was as though he was afraid of being



overheard, and was looking to see if there was anybody near them. Turning towards her again, he whispered,

"It is because I love you, and he does too, or thinks he does, and tries to keep me from getting near you."

"Now you are talking the most utter nonsense," replied Miss Singleton, with the greatest promptitude and decision. "Why, child, I am old enough to be your grandmother; and I have no intention of allowing a boy of your age to make a fool of himself about me."

"I don't care," he answered, passionately. "I don't believe you're one bit older than I am; and if you are, what matter? I love you, and that is quite enough for me, without my caring to know your age; for if you were a hundred, it wouldn't alter the fact."

"I don't choose you to talk so to me," Clara replied, with dignity. "If it's a fact, keep the fact to yourself, but don't trouble me with it again. I have done with all that kind of thing."

"Now I have offended you," groaned the young man. "Don't look at me so coldly, or you will drive me mad. For pity's sake be

good-natured and kind to me, as you used to be, and I will try not to annoy you any more. But just answer me one question, will you?"

"That depends on what the question is."

"You don't like Norton, do you? You wouldn't listen to him, if he was to say to you what I've said to-day, would you?" he asked, imploringly.


"What an absurd boy you are!" she laughed. "If I did like him, and gave you a true answer, it would only make you more unhappy than you are now. However, that is not the case," she continued, moved to pity, as she saw how the poor fellow's lips quivered as he watched her, and listened. "On the contrary, I like you ever so much better than I do him."

"I'm so glad!" he said, with a sigh of relief; and then he covered his face with his hands, and Clara imagined that, in spite of his joy, he was not very happy. She got up, intending to go away, for the sight of his sorrow pained her; but when she moved he looked up, revealing a very pallid, haggard face, and holding her dress, begged her to sit down, which she did, as there were some people approaching, and Hertford was so wrapped up in his own griefs that

he would not have noticed them, and would have continued his entreaties in spite of their presence. On her resuming her seat he became more pacified, and they presently began to talk easily about different subjects ; but Clara's sense of quiet friendliness for her two boys had been rudely broken, and she was glad when she got down below, and was able to think it all over.

"I am sure it was not my fault," she mused. "I was only friendly to them, and never expected anything of this kind. I'm sorry for that boy ; he seems so unhappy, and yet I never can think of him in any other way than I do at present. How glad I shall be when the voyage is over, and I can escape from all this."

And glad, indeed, she was when, at last, they cast anchor in Port Jackson, and Mr. Joyce came on board to fetch her. During the whole of the rest of the voyage, poor young Hertford had attached himself exclusively to her, following her about like a dog, and watching her with a dog's wistful, mournful expression in his eyes. It pained her to see him thus, and yet she could not help it. She tried laughing at and making fun of him ; and that failing, she tried being patient and gentle with him, showing him that



this fancy must certainly fade away when he mixed again with the world, and met other women that pleased him. But he was quite determined not to listen to reason. Nobody, he declared, ever could be to him what she was ; and at length she was driven to forbid his alluding to the topic again, and avoiding him quietly, whenever she could do so without exciting his observation. If he guessed she had tried to get out of his way, the next time he got near her in private she had a terrible scene to go through, and when he could not get near her, he would follow her about, gazing at her with his sad, wistful eyes, in a manner that nearly drove her crazy. The day or two before they arrived in Sydney he had been in very low spirits, and the last night they were on board he managed to get her alone, and monopolize her for the whole of the evening, disregarding her commands as to the forbidden subject, telling her over and over again that he should never forget her, that he should see her again, and then begging her to show him a little more kindness on this the last occasion that they would be together for some time.

She was greatly distressed at seeing him in

this state, but could not alter her decision. At length she resolved to tell him the truth.


"I cared for some one once," she said, "who deceived me, and married another woman. I can't care for anyone now, and I don't intend to marry without loving the man who would be my husband. Now you know all, you must understand how painful it is to me to see you thus, and how utterly hopeless your love is."

"I don't see it at all," he answered. "I see you don't like me, and won't have me, but there's no reason why you shouldn't. I think you have behaved very badly to me, leading me on, and letting me think you liked me, and then turning round and telling me you never can care for me."

"You don't—you can't, and don't think what you are saying," replied Clara, stung that he should accuse her of a meanness she had never been guilty of.

"You are right," he answered humbly. "I am almost mad, I think; I know well your conduct has been kind and gentle to me throughout."

After this she went below, and shed many bitter tears, not for herself—in that cause she



never had many to shed—but for the young man to whom she was causing so much sorrow. It was only for a time, she was sure ; and yet, whilst his infatuation lasted, he suffered as much from it as if it was the most enduring and faithful passion in the world.

She was glad to get off early next morning with Mr. Joyce—glad to get out of sight of the wistful, earnest gaze that had followed her for so long, and that watched her into the boat, and saw her disappear, before it was withdrawn, and young Hertford went down to put his traps together and go off himself. The ship was lying out in the bay, and Clara had plenty of time to look at Sydney from the water whilst being rowed over to the boat-quay. The view she got of it pleased her very much, for after so long a residence on board the ship, the very doubtful verdure of New South Wales was refreshing to her eyes ; and besides, everything looked delightful, now she had left ship-life behind, and found her Uncle Joyce, though a shrewd, long-headed colonial, a good-natured, agreeable man.


“ I hope you haven’t left your heart behind you on that ship,” he said presently. “ I think

I saw one or two very disconsolate faces as you were saying good-bye; but that wouldn't do at all, as the people who come out are generally as poor as church mice, and have to make their fortunes before they can think of marrying."

"Don't be afraid for me, uncle," she answered, laughing. "I haven't left my heart on board ship."

They did not stop in Sydney, but went on next day by the boat to B——, where they arrived on the third day, and where Clara was very glad to rest at last, after her long journey. She got on very well with all her new relations, as, indeed, she generally got on with everybody; but Sophy Joyce, our old friend, puzzled her not a little. She had such a curious way of saying anything that came into her head, or that appeared to come into her head; for after a little closer acquaintance with the young lady, Clara decided that often her most extraordinary naïve speeches were the result of great deliberation, and that nothing was so much the result of study about her as her natural manner.

This sounds a contradiction, but it was emphatically true. Sophy knew that many things she said and did would merit censure, were



they known to be the result of calculation, that were received as charmingly innocent and child-like, when supposed spontaneous outbreaks of nature. Clara saw through her shortly, but did not show that she did so, for she guessed rightly that would only arouse her cousin's ill-will, and that she could be a formidable enemy, if she chose.

"When does your wedding take place?" she asked one day, when they had been talking over the bridal dresses, and inspecting some presents the bride-elect had that day received.

"This day three weeks," replied Sophy. "I wish to goodness I could put it off indefinitely. If it had been Herbert Griffiths I was going to marry, I shouldn't mind; but this young idiot of a Hamilton I only take because he's a catch in the money-market, and as I can't have the man I want, I may as well take him."

"Who is Mr. Griffiths?" asked Clara, carelessly. "I don't think I can have seen this paragon of yours."

"No, he's away up at Green Creek. Next time he comes down, I'll introduce him to you; he's the most delightful man, without exception, in the colonies, though I don't know if he's



quite so much to be pitied as he tries to make out. I was engaged to him, you know, dear, but we had to break it off because he told us he was married already. Such a nuisance, wasn't it, when we liked each other, and could have got on very well together?"

Clara laughed.

"Well, you are a curious girl," she said; "at any rate, it hasn't broken your heart; but if you'll not be very angry, allow me to say I think, from your description, this Mr. Griffiths must be a villain."

"Hard language, my dear," replied her cousin; "I won't say you're not right, but then you haven't seen him, or you'd forgive him anything."

Clara laughed, and didn't trouble herself any more about this fascinating gentleman, while she couldn't help thinking that her cousin's sentiments were curious for a young person just about to be married.

## CHAPTER V.

WHILST these events were going on, and Clara Singleton was on her way out to Queensland, Griffiths was becoming accustomed to his duties and his society at the diggings. They were most of them a very rough set, no doubt, but here and there might be met a man of education and refinement, doing his best to earn his share of the precious metal, without which he could not enjoy the civilization he was fitted to adorn. The sprinkling of these men through the mass of roughs reminded the Commissioner of the bright grains of which they were in search, shining out through the sandy, unfruitful soil; but it must be allowed that, if they sometimes shone, it was not always the case that they did so, and moreover sometimes their sparkle was like the gleam of an evil meteor, not the light guiding to good that

it should have been; and in no instance was this more remarkable than in that of the head magistrate himself.

One great fact that reconciled him to his post, and furnished a link between him and the men around him, was the prevalence of gambling. Men who by hard work had in a few weeks amassed a considerable sum, were always ready to lose it all in one night over euchre, spoilt five, cribbage, or any such game; and in this amusement Griffiths was always ready to join, when he could manage to do so without the matter getting wind; for if it became known to the authorities above him, it would most probably have caused him to lose his place at once. He was often very successful, and netted large sums; but money so won seems to have double the power of making itself wings that pertains to all riches; consequently, in spite of his gains, he was almost always in difficulties, and was enormously extravagant, throwing away money by handfuls wherever he thought it would yield him a good return by ensuring him popularity.

This was his great desire—to become a king among the miners, reigning by the popular

voice, and to be equally popular among the neighbouring planters, so that, even if any of his wild doings came to light, he might still have so strong a body of partisans as should make it expedient to overlook his misdeeds. For this end it was necessary that he should be all things to all men—a character his versatile talents well fitted him to play, and which he had often tried before with success. The miners voted him a trump, and, though a swell, one of the right sort; he could handle a pick or shovel when he liked as well as any man; he could play as high, and when he won spend more freely than any of the other fellows on Green Creek; and the squatters agreed unanimously that Mr. Griffiths was an acquisition—all the polish of the old country added to the daring and activity of the new; a man who could be charming and polite with ladies, but who emphatically was not a lady's man, though he was quite as much at home in their society as he was in that of men. The best rider, the deadliest shot, of any man about, and report said the greatest daredevil on the diggings, though about that these gentlemen did not profess to know much. Besides, it was very gratifying to their feelings

that, though he was Gold Commissioner, he understood and sympathised in their belief that gold would be the ruin of the country, and end by destroying their class and damaging their runs.

They were not aware that this man, to whom they confided so freely their opinions on the state of affairs, and who concurred so fully in their views, would often, in his rides to their houses to pay visits, or to join in any of their festivities, turn aside from the track, and "prospect" over their runs, with a view to finding any traces of the metal the discovery of which he so much deprecated. They would hardly have believed it had they been told it, or, if believing it, would have excused him to themselves by saying that he must have stumbled on it accidentally, and then, by the duties of his office, was compelled to take notice of its existence. He wasn't so fortunate, however, though it was not for want of seeking, whenever he had an opportunity of getting out alone, without any of his numerous friends and admirers; for though one would have thought it would not make much difference to him whether he discovered gold in company or not, yet it

was certain he preferred the idea of finding it when alone.

By day the diggings were very quiet and deserted, the miners being almost all underground, and he was generally busy in his office selling claims, settling disputes, &c. Often after his work was done he used to go round paying visits to the shafts, and seeing how his friends were doing, and what chance there was of his making a good haul at the next gambling-bout; but he didn't care to stay very long down below, the heat and damp suffocated him, and his social talents were best displayed above ground. At night his presence was often required on the diggings, to quell the quarrels that would arise between drunken miners, and which his subordinates were powerless to put down; for he seemed to have a curious influence over the unruly, and a look or word from him had more power to restore peace than the threats or punishment of others. The secret of this supremacy was clearly explained by a miner who had just been engaged in a violent brawl, and who had drawn his knife with deadly intent, when the Commissioner appeared, and said calmly,

"Put up the knife, Jackson. There's no good in getting hanged before your time; it will come soon enough."

He said no more, but the man obeyed with great willingness, and explained his acquiescence thus afterwards—

"You see, Bill, I know Grif" (thus he designated our friend) "is fifty times as bad as you or me, and would stick a knife into a fellow as soon as look at him, if there was anything to be gained by it; but he'd take very good care to make himself safe the while. And when he looks at me, and speaks to me that way, it's just all one as if he said, 'You precious fool, stick your man if you like, when you can do it safely, and get anything by it, but don't expect I'll help you out of the mess, if you're such an idiot as to get into it for nothing. I might do something to assist a clever villain, but for a fool nothing.' Ah! he's a deep 'un, he is, and I shouldn't wonder if we have fine doings with him here some day. Not as he'll ever be found out, though, for he's a man as can keep his own counsel."

But besides being friends with the miners, and having unbounded influence over them, we have

said Griffiths was very popular with the ladies, and was perpetually entertaining them with balls, pic-nics, and such amusements. He was supposed to be a bachelor, and was consequently very much run after; not that bachelors were rare there, or that there were any young ladies to marry, because there were none; but an unmarried man, who has plenty of money, and spends it freely for their amusement, is always a much greater favourite with some ladies than a married man who is similarly good-natured; and the class of women with whom this is the case are more prevalent at the diggings than the other kind.


All this popularity cost money, and once Griffiths found how successful he had been in his endeavour to become the head of Green Creek society, he could not endure the idea of in any way giving up his superiority. Therefore, though every day he ran more and more into debt, and though every day a way of escape from his debts became more difficult, he resolutely put the thought of the settling from him, determining that, when the necessity became urgent, his good luck would some day enable him to win an enormous sum at cards, and



allow him to escape from his entanglements in that way.

All the diggers not in the secret of his gambling propensities, and all the squatters round about, were of opinion the Commissioner must have some private means beside his pay, as it was quite impossible he could afford to live in that style unless such was the case. When anyone hinted this to him, he immediately owned, with great freedom and candour, that he had an income from some property in England; and though many wondered he should have come so far, and undertaken so arduous a post, under those circumstances, still it was evident he must have what he said, or how could he keep up such an expenditure?


About a month after Clara Singleton arrived at the Joyces', and after Sophy had married Mr. Hamilton, the bride wrote to Griffiths, giving an amusing account of her wedding, and enumerating among her bridesmaids her cousin, Clara Singleton. Then, remembering that the person to whom she was writing had not been down to B—— since her cousin's arrival, she went on to relate her history, and describe her appearance.



“Her mother was my father’s sister,” said the letter, “and she and her mother lived for many years with her mother’s own brother, Colonel Langham. After her mother’s death, and when Colonel Langham was ordered out to New Zealand, Clara came here, and has now been at Prospect about a month. She is pretty, with a fair, pale skin, brown hair, and dark-grey eyes. She has a particularly sad expression, which, being unusual among our colonial beauties, has driven all the men here mad about her, and I think, if it hadn’t been too late for Hamilton to retreat, he’d have cut me, and gone in for her instead. She doesn’t fancy any of them, and is so wonderfully cold and polite that the foolish fellows would break their necks if she would only look interested by the catastrophe. I never saw any woman before so thoroughly indifferent to the sensation she excited; and I often wonder is it wisdom or foolishness that gives her such strength of mind. I wish this paragon had met you—I should have liked to have seen if you could have fascinated her into giving you some more pleasant look, out of those sad grey eyes of hers, than she favours all the rest of them here with. I am not jealous,

you see, or else I would not have admitted the existence of her attractions, but have simply contented myself by declaring all the men here had gone mad; but I flatter myself anyone who liked me as well as you did, wouldn't care for her style; and the loss of the others doesn't trouble me as you may imagine. Next time you go to B——, call at Prospect, and get a look at my cousin—she's worth seeing. I haven't done her half justice. And you can come on to see me and Hamilton afterwards, and tell me what you think of her."

When he had finished reading the letter, Griffiths turned back to the part about Clara, and read it over again; then with a sigh he folded it up and prepared to go into the office. Little as Clara would have believed it, or as Sophy Hamilton would have imagined it possible, there was a sore feeling in his mind whenever he thought of the true-hearted woman whom he had deceived, and who he feared could never think of him again as she had then thought of him, even though she could not feel for another man as she had felt him. He understood that the respect and admiration of his character, that had been the



foundation of her love, was gone for ever, but he did not know that without it love could not retain its hold on Clara Singleton's heart.

That day he hardly knew how he got through his work, his mind was busy with so many things totally foreign to the matter in hand. Instead of groups of men in rough clothing and cabbage-tree hats thronging into his office, he seemed to see again the drawing-room in the little house at Aldershot, where he last saw the girl with the pale face and sad grey eyes described by Sophy Hamilton. It was like that he last saw her ; but his mind, wandering further back, recalled the time when her cheeks were tinged with a beautiful colour, and her grey eyes sparkled with merriment. He could remember the mirthful intonation of her fresh youthful voice, and the easy gaiety with which she received the attentions of Montessor, or any other fellows hanging about her ; but how the colour would deepen in her cheeks, and her sweet eyes fall before his, when he taught her for the first time the greatest lesson of a woman's life, till then unlearned by her !

"What's that you're saying, Peters, about some one having jumped your claim?" And

with a start he came back to reality, saw the bearded faces crowding round him, heard the laughing and jokes of those waiting outside, and knew that a puny digger before him was complaining because some one had "jumped" his claim. "Have you been working it lately?" asked Griffiths, in his sharp, business-like tone.

"No, sir. I took a touch of fever the day I bought it, and I've been down ever since—that's about a week; and when I went yesterday evening to begin, I found a gang of fellows had jumped it."

"I'll see about it. You can't turn them out of that spot, as you hadn't begun to work it; and if they've paid their licence, they're all right. But you shall have another place. Now, Wilkins, what do you want? Has anything happened at Mr. Murray's station?"

This question was addressed to a man who burst in suddenly, as if in a great hurry, and elbowed his way up to Mr. Griffiths, in spite of some opposition from the miners.

"It's the bushrangers, sir," the man replied—"they drove a hundred head of cattle from me last night, and I want to get some help and go after them. I came to you, because it's always

the readiest way to go to the head first."

"Have you been to the police?" asked the Commissioner, with decision.

"No, sir—I ran here the first thing—they took my horses too."

"Go, and tell the police. I'll be with them in an hour. Tell the officer to have them all ready for a start—and stay, does Mr. Murray know his cattle are gone? We'd be better for his help."

"I hadn't time to tell him, sir; and I'm almost beat with the way I've come already."


"Tell Mr. James, the police-officer, to send one of his men off with this note to Mr. Murray—I've told him where to meet us. And then get what rest you can, for you'll have to come with us."

The man vanished, and the Commissioner, now thoroughly roused out of his reverie, put his shoulder to the wheel, and finished his work before the hour was up; then he rose, gave himself a shake, and calling the man Peters, said, "Choose yourself a claim somewhere, and I'll come and look at it and measure it to-morrow." Then, ordering his horse out, he jumped on its back, and rode off to meet the police.

"This is the second or third of these affairs lately, Mr. James," he said, as he joined the force, "and now we must put it down. This state of things mustn't continue. Presently we'll be told it's the diggers that are doing it."

"Very likely," answered James, laconically; and in a few minutes they were on the march to the spot from which the cattle had been driven off.

For the next eight-and-forty hours he had no time to think about any of his troubles and difficulties; but after they had overtaken the bushrangers, and come off victorious in a sharp skirmish, as he lay by the camp-fire at night, his thoughts would revert to the subject that troubled him. He was getting dreadfully hard up, he reflected. Day by day he became more so, and now he could not marry again in that colony, and so secure himself an easy and comfortable living; for pleasant and generous as Mrs. Hamilton sometimes was, yet he well knew her generosity would not be such as to allow her to bear with patience the sight of his consoling himself with another for her loss. Even if he could blind her parents with an account of his wife's sudden death, he could not




hope to blind her, and it was her vigilance that would be most dangerous to him, rendering it very probable that she might think it worth her while to seek out his wife, and find if his story was true, in order to be revenged for his desertion. Such, at least, was the light in which he drew her character to himself, and he ought to know her better than anybody.

Then he thought of the news she had that day told him, that Clara Singleton was in the colony, and in Mr. Joyce's house. How he longed to see her! He wondered that he had dared think of a marriage for money while it was possible for him to obtain her. If he could only persuade her that Ethel was dead, and induce her to take him, as he knew she once would have done! He was not capable of understanding how completely his conduct had struck at the root of her love—how respect and confidence were necessary to it. He thought he had only to present himself to her and be forgiven, as in the old days he had won so easy a victory over her affections. But even these hopes were too high and wild to be realized, he was obliged to acknowledge. Why had he told the Joyces about his former marriage? or



why, having told, could he not dupe them into thinking that the woman who had stood in the way of his happiness once was gone, and would stand in his way no more? But there Sophy Hamilton came in. As she could make it her duty and interest to bar his way to a wealthy marriage, so she would also prevent his winning her cousin; and unless he could hope to do so, what avail would it be to him to see her again? It would only increase his regrets; it might make them keener and more difficult to bear, and he was convinced it would make her miserable. Not that, under other circumstances, that thought would have influenced him much; but, anxious to avoid suffering himself, he gladly availed himself of the plea proffered by the suffering of another.

Then his mind reverted to a different source of anxiety. He had been losing money lately at the gambling-parties he frequented, and he felt, unless he shortly had some great stroke of luck, he should be irretrievably ruined. He had a large gambling debt to meet, but he had been given a few days law before being called upon to pay it, in order that he might, as he said, write to his bankers at B——; his time



would be up the day after to-morrow, and he knew, if he failed to "stump up" then, he would be "blown" all over the camp before the evening. He had a few pounds of ready-money left, and intended to try his luck with that next evening, when he returned to Green Creek. If he lost—and he ground his teeth, and swore low and deep as he thought of all that failure implied to him—then he must either find some other way of meeting the claim, or consent to be branded as a defaulter, wanting in honour and honesty, amongst the comrades over whom he was now king. His gambling propensities would also reach the ears of the government, and he might then expect that, in spite of the support of his friends, he would not long be permitted to hold the position he then enjoyed.

There was still another way in which he might avoid his difficulties, he thought suddenly; the idea leaped into his mind like a flash of light, and took overwhelming possession of him on the instant, though he tried to put it away forcibly, or hide himself from it. It seemed to him like a kind of leering, mocking devil tempting him, leading him on to destruction. He knew that the course it proposed

was one fraught with risk and danger, where failure and detection were certain and utter ruin, probably death; but still he could not drive the fiendish visitor from his mind; it had entered in and taken up its abode there, and would give him no peace, showing up constantly the feasibility of its project, the ruin that must await him if he did not follow its counsel, and the ease with which he would be able to make all straight before any danger of detection arose. An inward voice whispered to him that the government gold was all in his hands, that it would be very easy to take what he wanted, and, on recovering his losses at play, he could repay it before the time arrived when it should be necessary to make up the amount, and send it down to B——.

It was wonderful how it had entered into his head, and with what pertinacity the idea seized upon him—it seemed so easy a way of getting out of his difficulties; moreover, he was sure that he could easily win back the money necessary to complete the proper amount, so that he need feel no uneasiness on that score. He would not resort to that expedient, he told himself, unless he was obliged to do so; but if

necessary, he thought it would be the most expeditious way out of his troubles. At times he was shocked at himself that such an idea had ever been able to enter his head, and he tried to banish it. He felt as if tampering with the Government money, even though he had no intention of really appropriating any, would dishonour him as he had not thought himself dishonoured by any previous act of his life; but when his better nature, fighting for the mastery, tried to point out this, the evil principle rose up and asserted its supremacy, showing him that, if he allowed himself to be governed by such childish scruples, he must make up his mind to have his character exposed, and his career blighted.

These busy painful thoughts kept him awake while his companions slept—even the wounded among them subsiding into an uneasy, feverish repose; and the sentinel, sitting by the fire, appeared to be plunged in such complete abstraction that he seemed carved in stone, except when now and then he roused himself to throw on more wood, or, when his time of watch had expired, he woke a sleeping comrade, with whom he changed places, and was soon as unconscious

as those around ; while the man just aroused would stretch himself, rub his eyes, yawn, and peer into the darkness for a few minutes, then settle himself comfortably by the fire, to wait until his turn should come to be relieved. Sometimes the stamping of the horses grazing near would break the stillness, or a groan from a sufferer close at hand ; then as night crept on towards morning, life began to wake in the bush, the cuckoo uttered his monotonous note, the opossum hissed and screamed among the gum-trees, the native dogs howled in concert, and a stir began to pervade the forest, though as yet it was quite dark. Overcome by fatigue by this time, Griffiths turned on his side, and was soon fast asleep, one thing clearly decided in his mind, which was that the means he had discovered of escaping from his embarrassments was too dangerous to be risked without urgent necessity ; but that, if that arose, he would not let foolish scruples stand in the way of his safety.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE morning broke with the cloudless brilliancy of an Australian dawn, the laughing jackass, with his discordant chorus, the magpie, with his few sweet notes, began to awake the forest, the sleepers arose, and presently the whole camp was astir; the fire was re-kindled, tea was made in the simple and excellent bush method, handfuls of tea being thrown on the boiling water, then covered up, and allowed to draw for a few minutes before it is poured out. The allowance for each man was a quart of the beverage, a quantity that seems to us prodigious, but is there considered only a very moderate supply. Damper and beef completed the meal, after the finishing of which the homeward march began. Their progress was greatly retarded on their return by the wounded and the prisoners; but towards evening they ap-

proached the diggings, and the Commissioner hastening on in front, hurried to his hut, to get some rest, before entering on the campaign he had arranged for the night. He was not a little proud of their successful expedition, the same bushrangers having been pursued two or three times before, always without success, and he had a pleasant inward conviction that, but for his determination and energy, the expedition would have been fruitless in this instance also. To-night he was to make his grand stroke of luck ; to-night he was to win back the money he had lost, or, failing in that, he must make up his mind either to be exposed by those to whom he owed the money, or to resort to the hazardous expedient that had come into his mind the night before, a course he shrank from, not so much because of its danger as because his morality on money matters had not yet yielded to temptation.

He took out the few pounds he had remaining by him, looked at them, put them into his pocket with an undecided air, as though he was aware he was about to do a foolish thing ; then, as the evening closed in, and after he had refreshed the inner man from the fatigue

incident upon his long ride, he prepared to sally out to the house where he knew the highest play went on. His presence there excited no comment—he was a pretty regular attendant; beyond a nod of recognition from one or two old *habitués*, no notice was taken of him. As a rule, the games played on Green Creek were American, such as euchre, spoilt five, &c.; but in the place Griffiths frequented, and which was the resort of people of more pretensions than the ordinary class of diggers, such games as hazard, loo, &c., had been introduced, and it was to the first-mentioned game that Griffiths now sat down. At first he had varying luck, sometimes winning, more frequently losing. His little stock of money was not very perceptibly diminished, but neither was it increased, and he became impatient at the slowness with which it grew either larger or smaller.

“I’d rather lose it all at once,” he said to himself, “than go on in this way. I don’t believe I shall be a penny richer or poorer at the end of the evening. I must play with a little more dash, perhaps that may change the luck.”

Acting on this resolution, he continued the game with a recklessness and disregard of



common prudence that soon produced results on his stock of ready money. It vanished almost at once, before he had time to realize what its disappearance meant to him, but even that did not warn him; he played on, and in a few minutes was in debt to nearly double the amount he had owed in the morning.

Then he remembered suddenly, and getting up from the table, he staggered away into the open air, his gait as unsteady and his head as bewildered as though he had been drinking. He had not been doing so, however; for him he had been remarkably abstemious, but the blow which this sudden loss dealt him was too hard to be borne with perfect composure, even by such a man as he. When he stepped out of the heated, smoke-reeking room, into the cool, fresh night-air, somehow the whole thing became clearer to him, and great as his losses had seemed to him before, they were yet more appalling to him now. He was literally without a penny, and not only that, but he owed five or six hundred pounds, which must all be paid in a few days—to-morrow, if possible—and which he had not the smallest hope of being able to clear off, unless he resorted to the means his

mind had already considered. That was the only hope now left him. He would not have to send the gold down to B—— before ten days at soonest, and in that time he might have retrieved all his losses, and be able to restore the amount taken, without anyone ever suspecting that it had been made of use to him before it had been made of use to the Government.

The cool air fanning his brow only awoke him to a keener perception of the danger and difficulty of his position, and for a few minutes he cursed bitterly the folly that had brought him to this. Then, as time passed on, and he strolled away into the gum-tree forest on the outskirts of the camp, he began to take courage, and to feel the influence of the calm, quiet night soothing his spirit, as it has calmed and soothed many a troubled spirit since the days when first sin and sorrow came into the world until now. Only he was hardened by its influence, instead of being softened; it seemed to enable him to hear the inner voice saying, "Courage, man, all is not lost yet. There is help and safety in the Commissioner's gold-chest, and why should not you derive benefit from it, when you have the care of keeping and collecting it? As for its

being one whit more dishonourable to use Government money than to run in debt, or gamble, or a thousand other things the world thinks right, there is not much difference between them, after all; it is only the name of robbery that frightens you, and what matters the name, if it is never discovered? Call it a loan to yourself, and you will see it is both wise and expedient."

Thus reasoned the tempter, and after a few minutes' struggle, Griffiths began to listen to him. After all, no one would know it, and therefore it could be no harm. He had all his life been rather inclined to believe in the axiom, "Thou shalt not be found out," as an eleventh commandment, more binding to a man of the world like him than all the others put together. And of course he would not be found out, he did not choose for one minute to think of such a possibility as that, for that would imply utter ruin to him, and he had no intention of giving up the game for many a year to come. He was becoming more fit to cope with the world, and make his profit out of it, every day he lived; he had but one soft place in his heart now, and he by no means wished that soft spot to harden altogether. It was his admiration, his respect

and esteem for Clara Singleton, that made him think of her always with reverential tenderness—the frank, cheerful girl, the true-hearted, confiding woman, wronged and injured by him, who he knew, cherished no resentment against him, longed as earnestly for his happiness as though his connection with her had done her good, and not evil. He thought of her thus for a minute or two, dallying with the recollections of that bygone time under the clear, pale moonlight. Then, breaking from the reverie into which he was falling, he set himself to determine how he was to pay his debts with gold taken from the Government supply. It was uncoined, had not yet been sent to the mint, and it would perhaps seem suspicious if he produced any large amount of raw gold. He had no means of turning it into money, and felt that he must invent some plausible explanation of its being in his possession.

After some reflection, he determined to apologise for paying his debts in bullion, by explaining that he had lately gone shares in one of the mines which was paying extremely well ; but as the Government might object to their Commissioner having any personal interest in

the diggings, it was only done on the quiet, and he would be much obliged if those whom he paid would not mention the fact of his having so much raw metal, which might excite suspicion. This settled, he went back to his house, and fastening the doors, went into his room, where the chest containing the bullion was placed. His heart beat quickly, and his hand trembled as he turned the locks and raised the lid; he had scales and everything requisite for weighing out the required quantity, and set about his task with a nervous haste that contrasted strangely with his usual calmness. He felt how unnatural and unusual his perturbation was, and tried to command his nerves by an effort of will—an effort in which he succeeded pretty well; and when the gold had been weighed out, an entry of what was wanting to make up the Government complement jotted down in his note-book, in characters understood only by himself, and the ponderous lid of the strong box closed and locked, he felt comparatively happy.


Though the night was warm and close, he had hung a curtain across his window, to hide what was going on within from anyone who

might be passing that way ; and many times, whilst weighing out the gold, he paused in his occupation, and listened to the thousand uproarious sounds that floated on the wind from the camp, where the diggers were still in the enjoyment of the pursuits with which they wile away the early part of the night, and the clamour of which was wafted plainly to him, as he sat over his task, straining his ears to catch every passing sound.

It was done at last, and he was safe. He portioned out the gold ready to deliver to those to whom he owed it, and then, with a sigh of relief, lighted a cigar, and leaning out of the window, began to build castles in the air, of a nature as different from those that he had built in early youth as was the country where he now dwelt—the scenery around him—from the quiet town in England where Ethel Courtenay had first taught him what the dearest dreams of a man's life might be. Now those things were all over for him ; money, and the way to get it easily and plentifully, was what occupied his mind—indeed, he compared himself, with a kind of scornful laugh at his own folly in having done so, to the man who killed the goose

that laid the golden eggs, in having run through his wife, Mrs. Grant's, property so quickly, and having allowed his impatience of her society to drive him into severing a connection that was certainly the most lucrative one into which he was ever likely to enter. He couldn't again take advantage of such an opportunity, even if he met with it ; and thus an honest and hard-working life was in a manner forced upon him ; for though he had the power of helping himself from the Government money-chest occasionally, as we have seen, yet, owing to the raw state of the precious metal, it would be impossible to carry off any great amount with him, if he should feel tempted to try to make his fortune in such a manner.

He remained pondering over these things for some time, thinking now and then, in a careless way, how he should obtain gold enough to make up the deficit before the money was sent to B——. But that did not trouble him much ; he had a little while to look around him first, and during that interval his luck at cards would undoubtedly change ; he would be able to settle matters, and, after such an escape, would be more careful in future.



These were his reflections as he leant out into the silent night, smoking his cigar, and gazing sometimes at the brilliant stars above him, sometimes at the more brilliant fires down in the valley below, round which thousands of miners were congregated, amusing themselves far into the night as a compensation for the labours and toil of the day. The cigar was smoked to the last ash presently, and the camp began to hush into silence; matters had all been settled in his mind, and anxiety as to the future must be put away for the present; he could not allow what might be to come between him and his rest. The unreal future had never superior attractions or terrors for his mind to the real present; he was tired and jaded, moreover, and had hardly laid his head upon the pillow before he was sleeping soundly and peacefully—the sleep of innocence and well-doing, a stranger would have thought, but it is a question whether the hardened offender, old in sin, does not enjoy the more perfect repose of the two.

Next morning he was astir betimes, and at his business, riding round the claims, selling them in his office, hearing disputes, and going



through the daily routine of a commissioner's life. He was anxious to get everything over early, after which he intended to call round on the people to whom he owed money, and settle his debts, quieting suspicion, if need be, by the story he had concocted last night. One of his principal creditors was a Mr. Benson, a squatter, whose run was situated on the other side of the camp from that of Mr. Murray. This man was not a professed gambler, but occasionally, when he came in to dine with Griffiths, or when he found himself in gambling company, he not only showed no disinclination to join in play, but frequently exhibited a skill and good luck that caused him to win very considerably. This was the man to whom Griffiths designed to pay his first visit, and out of whose power he was most anxious to get; for he was a disagreeable, surly-tempered fellow, very close with the money he won so easily, and had grumbled more than once when Griffiths had been unable to pay upon the spot.

Thither the Commissioner rode, as soon as business was over, carrying with him the amount due, part of it in notes and coined gold, but by far the larger proportion in the raw metal.

"I'm glad to see you've come on business," said Benson, when he met his visitor. "I was in bad want of that money, and if you hadn't turned up just when you did, I'd have been out, and perhaps been away several days. We had a robbery committed about the place; I think it's some one from the mines has done it; at any rate, I've sent for the police, and we may have to be away, as I said, for a day or two, in case they've taken the things inland to hide till the row blows over. How much have you there?"

"The whole sum—two hundred pounds, wasn't it, I owed you? I have not got it all in money; it is not always easy to get such a sum here, but I suppose you'll take it in gold?"

"Yes, it don't much matter how you pay it, so as I get it. Do you know, Griffiths, you live so fast, and spend such a lot of money, that I thought you must be nearly cleaned out, and was beginning to feel nervous about ever getting this," said Benson, with a pleasant air of frankness, as his debtor began to count out the gold.


"I wonder you care to tell me that, even if you thought it," answered Griffiths, with a

scowl; "it isn't a safe thing to let a man know you consider him a defaulter in honour, and it's certainly an ill-timed and unmannerly jest, if meant as such."

"What! you want to bully me, do you?" cried Benson. "I speak as I choose to everyone, and I'm not likely to trouble myself to be polite to a fellow who owes me money, even though he be the Commissioner himself. I don't care to take so much gold as this. How do you come to have such a lot?"

"I don't know that I care to tell you," replied Griffiths, haughtily; "if I was to let you know my speculations, ten to one they would be blown all over the place in no time, and I should get into trouble. It's enough for you to know that it's there, and that it's good gold. Give me a receipt; I'll not trust you farther than I can see you."

He saw that with a man of this sort it was necessary he should take a high hand, and bully, if he did not want to be bullied; besides, a casual allusion, such as that to his speculations would, he knew well, convince Benson of their reality a great deal more surely than any carefully-prepared story would do. He was



right. After a minute, Benson came nearer to him and said,

"You needn't be so stiff with an old friend; tell us what are the speculations that pay best; you have the best opportunities of anyone for knowing what is going on, and you might give a fellow a little help in the way of making some money."

"No, no, Benson," laughed Griffiths, pocketing his receipt, and walking towards the door, "that would never do; you'd manage to walk off with all the profits. There isn't room for you and me in the same boat. Here are the police, so I'll wish you good-bye."

By this time he was at the door; and jumping on his horse, that was tied to a paling close by, he rode away, Benson's eyes following him enviously as he disappeared, until, after a minute, he turned to welcome the police-officer, who just then rode up with two men.


"So you've had the Commissioner up?" said the officer, as he dismounted. "I didn't know this was a case where you wanted him. What does he say of it?"

"Oh! he wasn't here about that at all. Come in and have something to drink; the men can

go round to the stables. He came to pay me some money he owed," he added, following his guest into the house. "I must put it away," he continued, as they entered the room, where the gold still lay on the table.

By Jove, there's a good deal there," said young Sawyer, the police-officer. "How does that man manage to live? I have talked it over several times with the men when we've been camping out, and having a quiet gossip to pass the time, and we none of us can make it out. He gambles, and loses large sums, he gives balls, he keeps race-horses, he does everything that it requires lots of money to do, and still he has his head above water, and pays his debts like that," pointing to the gold on the table. "He's a pleasant fellow—we like him—as jolly a companion as ever lived, but for all that I don't think he's all right, and should never be surprised if he came to grief some fine day."

"I'll tell you what it is," answered Benson, "he speculates, and has got into some very good thing just now. I got that much out of him, at any rate, but he refused to put me in it, so I don't mind letting it be known what he's



up to. I shouldn't wonder that he's got a hold of a mine somewhere, known only to himself, and that he's cheating the revenue that way. The Government ought to investigate his speculations."


"So they will, I've no doubt," replied Sawyer, "if you take care to talk about them a good deal; though even if he was kicked out, I don't think we should get as good a fellow in his place. Come, we must go round and look at this spot where you say your house was broken into."

They went off about their business, and soon forgot Griffiths, or at least Benson did, but not Sawyer, who turned the matter over in his mind, and was quite convinced there was something wrong about the Commissioner, though what it was he could not yet determine.

In the meantime the object of these conjectures had ridden round among all his creditors, and paid them the sums he owed. It did not excite much remark in a place like Green Creek that most of his payments were made in bullion; in fact, when he had settled with Mr. Benson, he had got rid of the most troublesome and suspicious of those to whom he was in debt, and as

he stopped chatting awhile here and there, after he had arranged money-matters, he felt quite gay and light of heart—never had he been so pleasant, never had he been more charming; everyone remarked what a delightful man he was when in good spirits, and most people regretted that his uncertain temper rendered him often unpleasant and gloomy.

When he returned to his house that evening he congratulated himself that everything had been settled so easily and comfortably. He had excited no suspicion, he had not been obliged to commit himself to any specific statement that could, on investigation, be proved false; he was free from the burden of his debts, or, at least, he only owed in one quarter, and that was to the Government; an inexorable creditor, truly, but one that for the present was not aware of his liabilities towards it, and might and should be kept in ignorance of them. That night he gambled high, and had an extraordinary run of luck; it seemed as if his daring and unscrupulousness had won the favour of fortune, and envious eyes watched him as he gathered up his gains, chiefly stakes of the raw metal, and prepared to leave for the night. He would willingly have




played longer, but people fought shy of him, his success was so great and unprecedented. It was not that they suspected him of dishonest play, or winning by unfair means, but they asserted, and with great truth, that he had the devil's own luck, and they knew that it would be useless playing with him any longer under such circumstances.

When he returned to his house he found he had more than enough to replace the deficit in the chest, which he did, breathing freely now he was quite out of danger, and promising himself, very earnestly and seriously, to give up gambling altogether in a day or two, as soon as he had amassed a little money to keep him going comfortably, in the style he appreciated, for some time to come. This was his resolution, but the next night's play altered it, inasmuch as he had lost all the surplus that had been left him after refunding to the Government chest; it became evident that if he wished to obtain a reserve supply, he must again have recourse to that place for funds to commence the next evening's operations. He did so, in spite of the promise he had entered into with himself not to touch the Government gold again; and



thus matters went on for a week; he played every night with varying success, sometimes winning, generally losing. At the end of that time there was a considerable deficit in the Government money. The escort was to start for B—— in three days, and Griffiths began to feel nervous, and to play higher than ever. One night he again won very largely, so as almost to cover what he owed, but the next evening, in attempting to complete the sum, he lost enormously, and when he paid his debts he felt really frightened at the state of affairs. The gold must be sent down next day, then it must be made all right, and how was this to be accomplished? Gamble he must that night; what if his fickle luck should then desert him utterly? It had been very treacherous and uncertain of late, how if it was gone altogether, and that great chest had to go down to B—— with the gold missing? He should be discovered, and branded as the thief. He writhed under the idea, and turned over in his mind what possible means of escape there might be for him. He was sitting alone in the little paling humpy (as the wooden huts are called), that served as his office, while he thought thus,



and he laid his arms on his desk, resting his head upon them in real apprehension and dejection, when the danger to which he was exposed presented itself to him. If the worst came to the worst, it was necessary that he should have some plan formed whereby he might ensure his safety ; he would have to fly, to take to the bush, to penetrate northwards towards Carpentaria, and there, under a feigned name, begin a harder and more struggling life than any he had hitherto tried.

But if the discovery was too sudden—if there was no chance of escape in that way—there was yet another resource—a desperate one, truly—the last one to which man can turn in an evil hour, and from which his nature shrank with a shudder. Life was yet enjoyable to him ; he had by no means grown tired of its pleasures, and as for its troubles, he had shirked them, and the monotonous round of his daily duties only made him appreciate the enjoyments he could obtain all the more. Still death, that friend of the forlorn and destitute, might help him also in this strait ; it would certainly be preferable to penal servitude for life, which would very likely be his doom, if brought to

trial for tampering with the Government gold-chest. He pondered over the matter a minute, muttered, "Yes, it is safer to have it;" then rising, he went to a small medicine-chest standing in a corner of the room, from which he often dispensed doses to the miners, and selecting a tiny phial, placed it in his waistcoat pocket; after which, sitting down again, he continued his meditations.

Presently a knock sounded outside; he did not hear it at first, but on its repetition he rose and opened the door, admitting three Chinamen, in their dirty blouses and baggy trousers. They carried bags with them, and put one of their number forward to speak as soon as they entered the hut, and found the door shut behind them. The individual who was to act as spokesman was evidently a celestial who had been long in the country, and who spoke English correctly and fluently. In answer to Griffiths's question, "Well, now, my men, what can I do for you?" he replied—

"Mr. Commissioner, sir, this one my chum, Chang Si, this other, he my chum, Yung Fo, my name am Sing Sing; we all work together one big claim, make not much, Mr. Commissioner,

till last week we get one big piecey gold, after that we get more gold, now have much plenty. Brought him here to-day, Mr. Commissioner, to get him sent to B—— to make into money. Paper money him easy to carry, nobody know when him in there," diving his hand into the loose front of his blouse as he spoke, to signify that banknotes could be carried there more easily than gold.

"You seem to have a good deal," answered the Commissioner, feeling as if these men had fallen from the sky to help him in his distress. "How much is it, Sing Sing?—that's your name, isn't it?"

"That my name," replied the individual who had before spoken, nodding his head violently. "Much plenty gold here with we—hundred—thousand pound," by which he meant to express that what they brought was somewhere between a hundred and a thousand pounds.

Griffiths knew from the look of the bags they had with them that it must be a good deal over the first-named sum; but the Chinese have vague notions respecting the difference expressed by the English numerals.

"Why do you want it sent to B——, and turned into notes?" asked Griffiths, as they proceeded to exhibit their store. "I thought your people liked keeping gold as it is."

"Too much heavy to carry," answered Sing Sing; "paper much better—just as good for money—better for Chinees to hide."

"Ah! you're afraid of the miners finding you have it; well, you're right, and you're a sharp fellow to think of taking notes; most of your fellows don't like them. What do the other two think of it?"

"No like it at first; then I show them what I buy with one piecey note, then they think all right."

As this conversation was going on, Griffiths was weighing the gold; when he had done so, he found to his great satisfaction that they had about nine hundred pounds between them.

"By Jove! you're lucky fellows!" he said, handing them an acknowledgment of the sum. "I'll give you notes for it whenever you come to me in B——, if you're down there; if not, you can get it when I come back. What are the other two fellows' names?"

"Chang Si and Yung Fo," answered Sing

Sing, with a profound obeisance, which was accurately imitated by the other two, neither of whom, it was very evident, understood one word of what was passing, and who appeared rather reluctant to leave their gold in exchange for the slip of paper they saw the Commissioner hand to Sing Sing.

As soon as they left, Griffiths carried the gold to his room, where the chest was kept, and from their bags replenished the Government store; after which he did up the small remainder of the Chinamen's money in a separate parcel, and locked it up with the rest. Then his business for the day indoors being over, he mounted his horse, and rode off to see his friend Mr. Murray, and ask if he had any commissions for B——, whither Griffiths was going with the escort next day.

"I hear several Chinamen on Green Creek have been making their 'pile' lately," said the squatter, in the course of conversation. "You'll have to look out and see that there is no rioting against them when it gets wind. Some of the miners I was speaking to yesterday seemed very much irate at the yellow men's good luck."

"I'm off to B—— to-morrow with the


escort—Jones, my deputy, must see to that; but I'll give him the word to keep the peace now you've warned me. I don't want any of the Ballarat anti-Chinese riots repeated here, though I daresay after all there's no danger. The fellows here know me, and know too I'll let no nonsense of that kind pass."

"What takes you to B——?" pursued Mr. Murray; whilst Griffiths began to think that after all, if there was a riot, and if a few of the Chinese were killed, his friends included, it would not be a bad job for him. But just as he had come to this conclusion, his friend's inquiry roused him, and he answered,

"There's a heavy lot of gold to take down, and I think it will be safer for me to be with it. Besides, it gives me a good excuse for going to town, which I want to do."

Mr. Murray said no more, and hardly thought it curious that Griffiths should be anxious about the escort of this particular batch of gold, because, as he explained, it was an excuse to get to town.

After a little more conversation, the Commissioner left, and as he rode quietly homewards, reflected on what his friend had been




saying. Of course it would be convenient if those Chinamen were out of the way, were it not for the fact of that acknowledgment he had given them for the money. If that fell into the hands of any of Mr. Sing Sing's relatives or friends who happened to be as knowing as himself in English manners and customs, he would not be one whit better off than before. Then he bethought him of the squatter's inquiry why he was going down to B——. Indeed, he hardly knew himself; if that escort were attacked and robbed, it would be in his eyes a most providential circumstance, and would relieve him from the fear of detection that now hung over him. It would be so easy to tell the Chinamen that, for greater security, he had deposited their money in the Government chest, and that it had been stolen with the rest. But no such luck was likely to befall him, and his journey was taken principally because he feared the Chinamen might turn up to ask for their money at B——, and it was necessary he should be on the spot, either to put them off with excuses, or, if hard-pressed, to borrow or raise it somewhere, so that he might again ward off the moment of discovery.




If it had not been for the difficulties in which he was involved, he would much rather not have gone down to B—— just then. Clara Singleton was at the Joyces', and he knew that, if Mrs. Hamilton got hold of him, she would insist on introducing him to her cousin, and all the change time and exposure had wrought in him would not, he knew, be sufficient disguise to hide his identity from her who had once loved him. He must avoid them; or, if he met Mr. Joyce by accident, must make some excuse for not going out to Prospect—at all hazards, he would shun meeting her, who could tell so much of his former life, and who would probably reveal his change of name accidentally, without being aware that she was doing mischief.

He felt rather miserable as he reflected that he should not be able to see her, and tell her how bitterly he regretted the old days, when he lived in such pleasant familiar intercourse with her; the days when, had he been wise, he might have fashioned his life in a different and happier way. Those unavailing regrets oppressed even him with a strange melancholy, though his was not a disposition to mourn over what was past and unattainable. He could not



but think that, after all, his daring, his undeniable cleverness, his popularity, had done but little for him in life ; and when by their means he had won some advantage, he rashly wasted his money, and misused his opportunities, till he found himself now, after several years' hard struggle in the world, worse off than he had been when first he started. If he could live his life over again, he thought, how differently he would act, now he could tell the true gold from the dross ; his eyes would no longer be dazzled by the wiles and manoeuvres of a coquette, nor his heart drawn away from the true-hearted woman who had given him her love, not unwooed, though it was unreturned. As he neared the diggings he roused himself from his reverie. For days past he had been gloomy, desperate, almost dangerous, brooding perpetually over the mess into which he had plunged himself, and from which he feared it would be impossible to extricate himself. Now, when he was again comparatively speaking free, his heart was too light within him to be long cast down, even by sorrowful retrospection, and his spirits rose, till he felt once more as the wild, high-spirited boy of former days had felt, whenever he forgot for

awhile the terrible stigma that lay upon his birth and name. Almost from his earliest years that had been against him—as a lad rendering his temper fitful and uncertain, warping all the noble tendencies of his better nature; as a man, forming to him an excuse for his wrong-doing, while the constant fear of his secret being discovered by those around him made him suspicious, and averse to close intimacy with anyone. Always on the watch for, and ready to take offence at, a light or slighting word, he had no confidence to bestow on any; and though his gay laugh, ready wit, and careless generosity procured him plenty of fine-weather friends, he had not one to whom he could turn for comfort in trouble, or on whose assistance he could depend in the hour of need. He knew it, and it wounded him, causing him to lay the blame not at his own door, where it was due, but on those dead parents, whose sin had put him at variance with the world, because he lacked the noble patience and endurance that would have enabled him to bear his lot with a dignity that would have disarmed the world's sneers. Now, however, he was in his best spirits, shaking the reins and shouting to his horse as he



galloped homewards, meeting on his way Sawyer, the police-officer, riding out on business, with an orderly after him.

"The Commissioner seems in good spirits," Sawyer remarked to his follower, when Griffiths had passed without stopping to speak to them. "He has been very glum lately, but to-day he looks as gay as possible."

The man returned no answer beyond a mere sign of assent, and the officer went on musing.

"There's something wrong in that quarter; one day he's so down you daren't look at him, the next he's as wild as the wildest corn-stalk in the colonies; and he spends such lots of money, it can't all come from his pay, and if he's got private means that enable him to keep up that style, what's he here for at all? I had better keep my eye on him, for he'll be wanted some day, I'm sure."


In the meanwhile the unconscious object of these reflections rode on, thinking also of the man he had just passed, and determining, when he came back from B——, he would cultivate Sawyer a little more than he had done lately.

"He is a sharp fellow," he mused, "and one that it would be better to have for a friend than for an enemy."

On the open plain that lay between Green Creek and Mr. Murray's station he saw three emus, and galloped after them for a mile or two, by way of giving vent to his excitement; then, when he perceived his horse was getting blown, he pulled up, and burst out laughing.

"What an idiot I am!" he exclaimed; "one would think I had found a gold-mine, instead of only having loosened imaginary fetters on my wrists and ankles. How the fellows down there at the Creek would laugh, could they see their worthy chief magistrate galloping like a lunatic after those birds, without any means of killing them."

He turned his horse's head again towards the camp, and that evening, instead of going out to any of the gaming-saloons, he remained quietly at home, packing his valise, going over his papers, and putting everything in order for the man who was to do his duty during his absence. At daybreak next morning they started. There were only two men armed to the teeth with the waggon that conveyed the gold, and he rode with them, also fully armed, and professing to think his presence necessary for the safety of the gold. They had not been long out when



they met Sawyer, the lieutenant of police, returning to camp; he had been out all night on business, and was in a hurry to get in, so he merely saluted and rode on, thinking, as he went—

“What a fuss the Commissioner is making about his gold this time. Even if there is a little more than usual, there’s no one about who would attack those fellows that are with it, and since we did for the rangers the other day it’s safer than ever. There’s something up in that quarter, and I fancy we’ll hear queer things about him some day.”

On the escort rode, or rather drove, for though Griffiths was riding, the other two were driving on the waggon, and had the benefit of the execrable road, which was, more properly speaking, no road at all. During the hot, dusty day they bumped, and plunged, and struggled onwards, conquering difficulties in the way of locomotion, that could be matched nowhere but on a broken-down corduroy road in Canada.

However, they were all well accustomed to the business, both horses and men, and got on cheerily, scarcely heeding the blazing sun, from which there was no shelter—not even when


going through forest-land, the tall, scraggy trees affording merely the faintest semblance of shade, that gave no relief to panting man or beast. Towards evening they came on a waterpool, and encamped beside it. They had passed numberless bullock-drays, and travellers of every description, on the way; also shepherds' gunyahs, or bark-huts, and one or two taverns, where people generally halted, to obtain drink, and to pass the night. Griffiths would not stop at one of these places—the temptation to drink would be too strong for his men, very likely; and if they once yielded, it might be some days before he could get them to go on again; therefore he pressed onwards to the roadside pool of muddy water, and there encamped for the night, making a fire and cooking their food, in a manner that betokened they were all experienced bush-travellers. The horses were turned loose in the bush, to pick up their supper as best they might; and one man being appointed sentinel, and ordered to wake his comrade when his time had expired, they rolled themselves in their blankets and were soon fast asleep. Next morning at daybreak they were up and at work; the horses were caught, the

tea made, breakfast was eaten, and another day's monotonous march began, exactly like that of the preceding day, ending by their camping on a spot very similar to the one they had occupied the night before. Next day, towards evening, they arrived at B——.



## CHAPTER VII.

CLARA SINGLETON was sitting in her own room at Prospect—she was reading some letters she had that morning received from New Zealand—one was from her uncle, the Colonel, the other from young Slingsby, who had become a great friend of hers before the regiment was ordered abroad, and who had asked permission to write to her sometimes, under pretence of telling her how her uncle was getting on, and whether he was taking care of himself. In Colonel Langham's letter there was not much news, though plenty of affection; and though she had smiled and sighed over it with a mixture of pleasure and sorrow, it did not occupy her long, and she presently laid it aside, taking up Slingsby's thick budget, which she knew by experience would contain all the intelligence he could lay hands on, no matter whether it happened to be of a comic or a tragic



nature; to tell the truth, tragedy just then was so frequently met with, that the little lieutenant, now nearly at the top of the list, and every day expecting his company, could not find much to say without relating some casualty among their numbers; though he slurred over those parts of the story, not wishing to pain unnecessarily the gentle heart to whom his letters were addressed. This particular letter she had just received was merry enough—all the ridiculous incidents that had befallen him on a hurried march were detailed with so much humour that Clara laughed heartily as she read, all unconscious that, while she was amusing herself over his words, he was lying stiff and cold, with his face turned up to the blue New Zealand sky, and a bullet from a rifle, made and supplied by English hands, buried in his heart. But she, ignorant that the warm, brave heart that had dictated those cheerful words had ceased to beat for ever, laughed over them, and thought what a nice lad he was, and what promise of good things might be discerned in his untried character. She was right there, he had ever been one of the foremost, he had won himself a proud name

among his comrades, and when his death was avenged and his dead body borne from the conquered pah, there was not one in the regiment that did not mourn for him as a brother, or regret him as a dear friend.

Suddenly, while she was yet reading, laughing and thinking, the door burst open, and Mrs. Hamilton flew into the room in her usual impetuous manner.

"Look here, Clara," she cried, "I've got the buggy, and you must come out for a drive with me. I've sent Hamilton off to a sheep-run up the country—he won't be back for two or three days; and I intend to have larks whilst he's away. I'm going for a drive round town now, so get on your things and come."

"Indeed, Sophy, I don't feel inclined to go out. I have had some letters from New Zealand to-day, and I've not quite finished reading them, so I don't care to drive just yet."

"Nonsense," answered her cousin; "I don't believe in sitting moping over letters. What possible happiness can it give you reading thoughts that passed through the minds of people ten thousand miles away two months ago? Why, they must be musty and withered

before ever they reach you; and perhaps the people who wrote them are dead when you read. If you only think of that, you wouldn't sit alone chuckling over them as you are doing now."

She didn't know how near she was to the truth, nor Clara either, though she flushed up and trembled as she answered,

"If I knew such was the case, they would be ten thousandfold dearer to me. I don't understand your way of looking at things at all."

"Very likely not, dear," replied Mrs. Hamilton, looking at herself in the glass. "I am a philosopher, and I don't believe in anything being really dear to anyone except self—that, I grant you, is always interesting; even love is a development of selfishness, and the difference between men and women, which makes the male sex so much the more worthy in my eyes, is their larger appreciation, worship of, and veneration for self. That's what brings me here to-day," she went on. "Mr. Hamilton told me yesterday evening Mr. Griffiths, about whom you have heard me speak, had come down from Green Creek. If I go into town now, and drive about slowly, I am pretty sure to see him,

and he is equally sure to come up and speak to me ; then I intend to ask him to dine here, and I shall come myself and do likewise. I want you to chaperon me ; and besides, I am so far unselfish that I wish to introduce you to this paragon of men, and should like you to fall in love with him, so long as he doesn't do so with you. I am perfectly candid, you see, so you can be on your guard, and must not be afraid to come with me."

"You are frankness itself," laughed Clara, "and since you admit it is for your own pleasure, not mine, you seek my company, I am quite willing to go, and give you the protection of my presence ; but you need not expect me to go into rhapsodies about Mr. Griffiths as you do. He's charming, no doubt, but I've passed the stage of caring for that kind of thing."

"Yes, I know you're a regular grumpy old maid, and wonderfully old, though you don't look it ; but as long as you'll sit by, and let me make myself agreeable to my Commissioner, I don't much care whether you admire him or not. I know quite well you are wondering what Mr. Hamilton would say to all this, but don't worry yourself about him ; he's accustom-

ed to my hero-worship. You know, I was engaged to the Commissioner before we found out he was married ; then I had to give him up, and take poor little Hamilton ; so it's quite excusable I should be spoony about *le beau* Griffiths."

Clara's eyes opened as she looked at her cousin, and listened to these sentiments. In all her life she had never heard any married woman express a liking for another man, greater than her affection for her husband, in such a perfectly out-spoken, free-and-easy, natural manner as this young Australian ; so, to stop her chatter, she hurried her preparations, and in a few minutes they were in the buggy, and driving in the direction of the town.

Mrs. Hamilton was a fine whip, the trap was light, and the beast between the shafts a good one, so that they were not long in reaching the town, about which they began to drive slowly, stopping first at one shop, then at another, while the shopmen brought out wares to exhibit, and the wealthy Mrs. Hamilton fingered and priced, and depreciated, and now and then bought an article, all the time it being evident

to Clara that she was only going through these manoeuvres to pass the time, and not because she wanted to make purchases.


Time passed away in this occupation, and still Mr. Griffiths appeared not. At length Mrs. Hamilton sat up with an air of determination, completed her shopping, gathered up her reins, and as she drove on again, said to Clara, with an assumption of mystery in her manner, "I'm going to do it."

"Do what?" asked Clara.

"I'm going to drive to the hotel, and send to him to come out and speak to me for a minute. If he's not in, I'm pretty sure, at a place like that, to find out where he's gone; then, if it's not far, we can drive after him, and meet him."

"But, my dear Sophy," cried the astonished girl, "I don't think you ought to do that. Won't it be making yourself very remarkable? I'm sure it can't be the correct thing to do."

"Making myself remarkable!" repeated her cousin—"why, you simple girl, don't you know I'm that already, and was before I was married? There's one advantage in it; strangers shrug their shoulders and talk; residents, and people who know me, say, 'Oh! it's Mrs. Hamil-



ton's way; there's no harm in her—she's only eccentric.' Everyone knows all about me and the Commissioner, and they know I run after him whenever he's in town; but they think it's a harmless craze of mine, for I never give them a chance of saying anything really bad against me—that wouldn't be right, you know; and as for anything else, I laugh at them, and find my eccentricities pay in the long run. I have my fun, and what's the odds so long as you're happy?"

Here Mrs. Hamilton's whip was brought down lightly across her horse's flank, causing the spirited animal to come up to the hotel door in dashing style, where he was pulled up with a jerk, and the lady asked, in her high-pitched voice, if Mr. Griffiths was in, and if so, whether he would come out and speak to her. A waiter went in, and returned immediately, to say Mr. Griffiths was coming. Presently Clara, who felt rather embarrassed in this position, could see a man advancing towards the door, though as yet his figure only was distinguishable in the shadow. As she saw him approach, she turned away her head, annoyed at having been drawn into a performance of this kind.



Griffiths himself, as he came out into the sunlight, did not at first perceive who the lady was, seated on the other side of Mrs. Hamilton in the buggy ; he only experienced a feeling of considerable annoyance at the very thing having befallen him he most particularly desired to avoid. He controlled his feelings, however, and advanced with his pleasantest smile to the vehicle, saying,

“I’m delighted to see you, Mrs. Hamilton ; it is quite refreshing to meet an old friend after my long exile at Green Creek.”


As Mrs. Hamilton leant forward to shake hands, she did not notice that her cousin had started at the sound of Griffiths’ voice, and turned eagerly to look at him. Her motion attracted his attention, and looking towards her, their eyes met. He could not perceive any change in Clara’s face as she looked at and recognised him ; but she was aware that a kind of terror came into his eyes as they met hers, and she felt he would have avoided that meeting if he could—in fact, she saw that he was afraid of her. Other suffering had burnt the mad, wild love, that had caused her so much pain, out of her calm, constant nature ; and,

though she had no affection of that kind to give to others any more, yet her heart only gave one strong leap at the suddenness of the recognition, and then beat quietly as was its wont. He saw that his power was gone, though she knew him, and a deep dull flush rose over his face, and the dread in his eyes changed into a pleading expression, as he remembered how much he was at this woman's mercy—how quickly she could let out all she knew of his former life, and set people on the track to discover what he had been doing since. Women loved vengeance, he believed, and here was hers ready to her hand. He stood transfixed, not heeding Mrs. Hamilton's chatter, dreading every moment that Clara would address him by name, and expose at once the false colours under which he was sailing. But after her calm, clear eyes had for a minute or two looked steadfastly into his, and read the feelings there revealed, she turned away again, and seemed as though her thoughts had wandered far away, and as though she was unconscious of his presence, or of her cousin's idle talk.

Such was indeed the case. Before her mind's eye rose up the dewy hedgerows and shady

lanes of her home across the seas, and she seemed once more to be riding with him through the grey twilight, and over paths strewn thickly with fallen leaves, tokens of the soft autumnal days, unknown in the dry, sultry land where she was now. Strange and sweet remembrances of the lost feelings of those days came over her ; it seemed so wonderful to her, in the sorrowful quiet to which she had now attained, that she had ever wearied and struggled for such a transitory thing as earthly love ; she recollected how her soul had panted and strained to win the affection for which she had been willing to risk her happiness, and now she saw that man could never have been what she believed him—could never have been like the ideal she had formed of him. As he stood there talking to her cousin there was something in the look of his bold dark eyes, in the lines of his handsome face, that betrayed the selfish, hard nature within ; instinctively she shuddered as she thought how blind she had been, to have wasted all her best feelings on him.

After a few minutes' conversation, during which Mrs. Hamilton found her friend very absent, she remembered her cousin, and went



through the form of introducing them to each other. They bowed, and Griffiths was evidently at a loss for something to say ; but Clara, who had quite recovered her presence of mind, spoke.

“I have been hearing a great deal about you from my cousin, Mr. Griffiths ; you seem to be great friends.”

She laid a stress upon the name that made the Commissioner wince. He thought, “It’s all up now ; she’s coming out with my real name.” She said no more, however, and before he could reply, Sophy broke in,

“Of course we’re friends. Don’t you remember I told you we were very near being married not so very long ago?”

“Oh ! yes, I remember,” interrupted Clara hurriedly, afraid that Sophy was about to detail the reason why that event had never taken place, and willing to spare the man the embarrassment of having his first wife alluded to in her presence, she being, as he was well aware, better acquainted with all the facts connected with that match than his new friend, her cousin.

“You don’t seem yourself this morning,” con-

tinued Mrs. Hamilton, with the provoking habit she had of saying the wrong thing always at the wrong minute. "Really you look at Clara as though she were a ghost. Have you ever seen anyone like her before?"

By this time he had recovered a little, but his smile was uneasy, and there was still the same pleading look in his eyes as he answered,

"It must have been in some former state. I have not met her here before."

Clara turned away her head. She did not care to see the humiliation of this man, whom she had once so dearly loved; and it seemed to her like humiliation that he should be forced to equivocate. Before she looked round again she heard Mrs. Hamilton ask him to dine that night at Prospect, and on his refusing she pressed and entreated, till at last she wrung from him a reluctant consent; after a few minutes more spent in conversation, the ladies drove away.

"Well, what do you think of him?" asked Sophy Hamilton, as soon as they were once more bowling rapidly out of town. "Isn't he handsome and delightful?"

"I was not as much fascinated as I ought to have been," replied Clara. "I have seen some

one very like him before—an officer in my uncle's regiment; so he is not quite such a *rara avis* to me as he seems to be to you."

"He didn't seem much struck with you either," pursued her cousin, "which is curious, for I should have thought you were the kind of woman any man would admire—all the men here do, at least."

"This one shows better taste," laughed Clara, while she remembered that it had always been so, since the days when, as Herbert Mounteagle, he had married Ethel Courtenay, leaving her after he had wooed and won her.

When they were gone Griffiths returned to his paper in the smoking-room, but finding his thoughts confused, and that the noise of voices around distracted his attention, he went up to his room to think. She had recognized him, that he knew; she had kept his secret as far as he had seen; that she must wonder at his being there without his wife, he could guess. What should he do? He thought awhile, and then determined to try and get an opportunity of speaking to her alone, after dinner at Prospect that evening. A private interview, with Mrs. Hamilton in the house, he knew would be dif-

ficult to obtain, unless he could induce her to arrange it as a trick upon her cousin ; and he thought, by skilful management, and judicious ridicule of the English girl's insular reserve, he might induce Sophy Hamilton to connive at a meeting between him and Clara, under pretence, on his part, of being anxious to draw her out, and see if there was anything in her.

Then he began to think of his difficulties. The money had been paid into the bank all right, and to-morrow he was to receive £2,000 in notes and coin to send back to Green Creek. As for the Chinamen's money, there was little remaining after he had made the Government accounts right, but what there was he had changed into notes for them, as they had desired, thinking perhaps he could persuade them only to take a small portion then, and that he could tell them the rest was lodged in the bank at B——, till such times as they should need it. He intended to remain a week or so in B——, and send the notes back to Green Creek by the escort that had brought the money ; they were well able to take charge of £2,000.

Thus everything seemed to be prospering with him, and settling itself as he could wish,

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and he began to calm down into a more peaceful and contented frame of mind, as he watched the light smoke-wreaths floating upwards from his cigar, and thought of the quiet grey eyes that had looked so steadily into his that day, and that had been wont, a year or two ago, to fall timidly when they met his gaze.


She was just as beautiful now as she had been then, though the deep soft eyes had a sad, far-reaching look, as though constantly gazing out beyond the bounds of this material world, into the vast solitudes of space, without ever meeting a kindred spirit with whom to commune and rest; her smile, too, though sweet as ever, had none of its old joyous frankness; the tinge of melancholy that had always been apparent in it was more marked and visible; sadness and patience were the chief characteristics of a face he remembered radiant as a Summer morning, and he could not help accusing himself of having been instrumental in the change. He knew so well how she had felt for him and thought of him; he knew and acknowledged to himself he had done all in his power to cause her so to think and feel. That was past now, but was it in his power to make reparation as he would



wish to do? He had learnt by this time to value the true heart thought of then so lightly, and he would willingly have played the same game again, with the intent to end it in a different manner. But even were he free—and he chafed in spirit as he thought how fettered he was in reality, in spite of all his apparent liberty—he had read in her look that morning that the place he had once occupied in her regard he had forfeited for ever; that she had learnt to know him more truly than in the days when she had listened to his words and believed in them; he felt that if he could persuade her to believe his story, and look upon him as a friend, it would be the greatest advance in her favour he could hope to make.

Whilst he was thus musing the waiter informed him there were some Chinamen below wishing to see him. In an instant his dream-land faded away, and he was once more face to face with stern reality.

“Show them up here,” he said briefly, while he rose and began pacing the room, thinking how he should put these men off, if they should insist on having all their money paid at once. He had not long to think about it, and had by



no means determined what to do, when the men were ushered into the room, and, as before, Sing Sing took upon himself the office of spokesman.

"Mr. Commissioner, sir," he began, according to his accustomed formula, "Chang Si, Yung Fo, and me, Sing Sing, come for our money. We come down same day Mr. Commissioner come, but not get here till now. Chang Si and Yung Fo they much hurry to get their money—come here at once to see Commissioner and get it."


"Very well," answered Griffiths. "I did not expect you here so soon, so I have left it at the bank; but if you will let me advise you, you will not take all your money and keep it yourselves. Leave it in the bank, where you will get interest for it, and where it will be quite safe. If you want any of it, take a hundred or so, and let the rest lie there."

With some difficulty Sing Sing was brought to understand this arrangement, which he then proceeded to explain to his mates, who, however, became very much excited, and would on no account consent to a plan which they looked upon as nothing better than a scheme for robbing them of their hard-won gold.

"They no leave money in bank," replied the spokesman after a time, in answer to Griffiths' query as to whether they would do as he had advised. "They say give money now—they much afraid they lose it."

"Very well," answered Griffiths, as calmly as he could manage to speak, when not knowing how to get out of the dilemma, "come to-morrow afternoon at this hour, and you shall have your notes. The bank is closed now, and I can't get it till to-morrow morning."

When this was explained to the other two men, they with some little demur agreed to return next day for the money. They were very much inclined to complain because it was not forthcoming at once, but on their showing symptoms of being troublesome, the Commissioner's brow clouded over, and he looked so stern that they shrunk away frightened, and contented themselves with grumbling out of doors, as they had not dared to do in his presence; one of them, Yung Fo, solacing himself still more by having recourse to a pipe of opium, which speedily reduced him to such a state of beatitude that, had he been told the Commissioner intended to keep all their gold,



he would not then have made the slightest remonstrance.

As soon as they were gone, Griffiths locked his door, and folding his arms on the table, he laid his head upon them, and gave way for a time to the most harassing doubts and fears. An hour ago, and he had thought everything was going well with him, now he really seemed in as bad a strait as ever. He could think of absolutely no one who would or could lend him the money. Mr. Joyce was the only man about who had a sufficient balance at his banker's to admit of his indulging in such generosity as lending a friend so many hundred pounds; but though he had the means to do so, Griffiths knew him too well to imagine for one minute that he would have the will. He would sound him that evening at dinner, but he would take good care not to commit himself to any request that would sever the connexion between him and that house, where he had always received so much kindness, and the owners of which had been the principal agents in getting him his present appointment. He was feeling terribly worried and oppressed when he set out for Prospect, but, under existing circumstances,

perhaps it was the best thing he could do to go out and shake his worries from him as much as possible, instead of moping over them at home. Indeed, that would have been quite impossible for him, had he felt inclined to do so. He was far too popular to be left alone by the gay young men of the place, once his arrival there was known; and numbers of his friends were very rare with Mrs. Hamilton for the brilliant move by which she had managed to secure him for that evening.

"You'd better look out, old fellow, or she'll hook you for that pretty cousin of hers, as she can't have you herself."

And Griffiths would laugh, and say he was much too wide awake for that, wishing all the while it were possible such a fate might befall him. He did not sit near Clara at dinner, and as her companion took up a good deal of her attention, he contrived to say to Mrs. Hamilton, who was next him, in a low tone,

"How reserved and stiff your cousin, Miss Singleton, seems!—quite English, in fact. Do you think I could manage to draw her out? I should like to try."

Sophy Hamilton laughed.

"Do try," she said; "she has not taken as great a fancy to you as I thought she would. She merely said you were very like an officer she had seen in England."

Mr. Griffiths was silent for a minute when he heard this, but presently he continued,

"How could I manage to get a tête-à-tête with her? for as long as there is anyone near, she seems determined not to be drawn out of that quiet reserve."

"After dinner I'll get her to go out to the garden for something, and you can follow her," replied Sophy; "but mind you tell me how you get on with her. I think you won't so easily make a conquest of her as you do of most women."

He changed the subject, and dinner passed off slowly to at least two of the party—to Griffiths because he was anxious to state his case in the best light he could to Miss Singleton, and induce her to promise that she would keep his secret as she had hitherto kept it; and to her, because she was hoping she might have an opportunity for asking him a few questions privately. She wished to know why he had changed his name—whether it was necessary

she should not let out that she had known him before he went out to the colonies under another name; besides, she was anxious to know where his wife was. From what her cousin had told her, she knew his young and beautiful wife could not be dead, but where then was she, and why had she not accompanied him to Queensland? Perplexed by these thoughts, she was glad when dinner was over, and glad also when Sophy Hamilton said suddenly,

"I'm not inclined for a stroll in the garden this evening, Clara, but if you like to take your usual moonlight walk, don't let these people prevent you. Mamma and I are enough for the ladies; and the gentlemen are of course talking of mines and digging, runs, fleeces, sheep, coolie labour, and the South Sea immigration, and won't appear here for ages, so go out if you like."

"I will, with the greatest pleasure," replied Clara, stepping out of the low window, and disappearing presently among the shrubs surrounding the house; while her cousin, looking after her, smiled mischievously, as she thought how easily she had fallen into the trap set for her.

Presently Griffiths entered the room. A look from Mrs. Hamilton warned him that she had arranged matters as she had promised, and stepping over to the window, as if for the purpose of speaking to him, she pointed out the path Clara had taken.

Clara was sauntering along slowly, enjoying the balmy air, only just beginning to cool a little after the heat of the day, and musing over the strange meeting of the morning, when she heard a footstep behind her, and turning hurriedly, found herself face to face with the man of whom she had been thinking. Alone with him, as she had been in the old days, when she had learnt to love him—alone with him, as she had never thought to be again, and for a minute she felt timid and embarrassed; then her calm, upright spirit asserted itself. She might have been foolish once—she had been so, from over-trustfulness—but she did not think she had done wrong in that matter; it was he who should have felt confused, not she. She paused as she thought thus, and waited, looking up at him in the moonlight, expecting him to speak. She looked very beautiful in the silvery light, and memories of the old time,



when he had so nearly loved her, came over him as he stood gazing at her ; he forgot all that had passed since then—all that now separated them, and putting out his hand, tried to take hers, as he said,

“Clara, I have suffered so much since we parted—I have seen and repented my folly in choosing beauty and wealth, in preference to a heart as true and warm as yours.”

She saw his movement, and stepped back, putting her hands behind her as she did so.

“Don’t speak in that way to me,” she said. “Do you think it can please me to hear that you no longer care for your wife?—do you think it can flatter me that you should exalt my character at the expense of hers? You make a great mistake, truly, Mr. Griffiths, and one that, I hope, you will not repeat.”

“You are changed,” he said angrily. “A few years ago I would not have got such a discreet answer from you, had I spoken to you as I do now.”

“Do you taunt me with that folly?” she asked—“truly I deserve it at your hands, for I must have been mad to think of you as I did then ; but that is all over now. I am quite

reasonable, and can even speak of my madness calmly, and can bear your allusions to it, though I think them unworthy of you. But surely you did not come out here to say this to me. I believe you came to speak to me; there is no one else out. What is it you want to say to me?"

"Are you not curious," he asked, "to know why I have changed my name? I will tell you all about it, if you will promise to keep my secret, and allow people to think you never met me till to-day. I don't want the world raking up my past history."

"I have not betrayed you as yet," she answered; "and if I did not do so in the first moment of surprise, you may be pretty sure I shall not do so now, though, if you will allow me to express an opinion, I will say that a man who has nothing to accuse himself of need not mind his past being looked into."

"Did I ever say that I had led a life that would bear inspection?" he cried impatiently. "I might try to deceive others, but with you I shall be open, as I know that, however much you may disapprove, you are true, and I am safe in your hands. The fact of the matter is,

I have done a good many things since I saw you last, that I should not like to be known. First and foremost, my wife displeased me; I thought she allowed another man to pay her too much attention, and I deserted her. After that I—” here he hesitated for a minute, and then went on—“I knocked about all over the country, getting my living one way or another, and not in a praiseworthy manner. I am always in difficulties, and always getting out of them by shifts at which scrupulous people would shake their heads; but I can’t afford to be scrupulous, and I don’t think I ever really acknowledged the fact that I was to blame for all this wrong-doing, till I met the honest glance of your eyes, that I remember so well of old, this morning.”

She looked at him gravely, without any approval or pleasure in her gaze; if he had intended to win her over by flattery, he must have felt he had not succeeded. He noticed her expression, and commented on it, saying—

“Don’t look as though you thought I was not speaking the truth; it is as I say, I assure you. I can see far more clearly the enormity of my wrong-doing, and can remember far better how much of it is due to my own evil dis-

positions, than I could this morning before I met you ; then I liked to fancy some one else was more to blame than myself, and, what is more, I did always contrive to lay the blame on some scapegoat, quite to my satisfaction. Sometimes it was my wife who was in fault, sometimes the friends I had collected round me, and who I daresay thought I influenced them more for harm than they had the power of influencing me ; but when I met you, and saw once more the calm, earnest, truthful gaze that first drew me towards you, I felt as if all the sophistries that I had gathered up as excuses for my life melted away before that glance, and left me even in my own eyes wanting in all the good and noble qualities that alone could win your regard, and for which in boyish day-dreams I had once hoped to be distinguished."

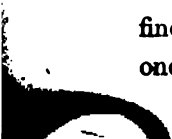
She had turned away as he spoke, but when he paused she looked at him again, and answered—

"However true your words may be, they are not such as you should address to me. If, as you say, you see your wrong-doing in its true light, try to amend your conduct. Seek your

wife, who is far too young and inexperienced to be left to battle with the world alone. If she has done no wrong, surely you should not so injure her as to leave her without friend or protector in such a country as this. But," she continued, "if you mean what you say, you know a great deal better than I do how you should set about correcting what you have done wrong; and it seems to me that the only reason you had for seeking this interview was to ask me not to betray you, which I promise very willingly not to do. As for what you have just said to me, I feel convinced no advice of mine will have more weight with you than your own convictions, which I hope will lead you to make any amends that may be in your power for the wrong-doing to which you allude."

She would have stepped past him as she spoke, and entered the house, which was quite near, but he stopped her.

"Is this the friendship you promised me so long ago?" he asked. "I know I don't merit it, that I have no right to claim it of you, but you said nothing would ever change you; and now, when I come to you seeking a friend, I find you fail me, and are as wanting as every-one else in that respect."



She flushed up a little, indignant at what she felt to be an unjust reproach, and answered—

“I do not see that you are in need of my friendship now, and you abused it once. When the hour of trial comes you will not find me wanting; till then you have no claim upon me.”

She passed him before he could stop her, and in another minute was in the house. As she entered, with gleaming eyes and flushed cheeks, Mrs. Hamilton smiled to herself, thinking that her irresistible Commissioner had found his way even to the cold heart of her obdurate cousin.

Presently Griffiths re-entered the room with the other gentlemen, as they came up from the dining-room, and his calm, quiet air satisfied Sophy Hamilton that, if he had achieved the conquest she had desired, he had also escaped scathless, according to her wishes. She very soon contrived to get a few words with him privately.

“Well, did you get anything out of her?” she asked.

“Very little—only a sermon,” he answered, laughing.

“She seemed excited when she returned, so I fancied you must have had an interesting conversation.”

"Teaching is warm work such a night as this," he replied with a half yawn, as if the mere recollection of the interview bored him; and Mrs. Hamilton completely satisfied that her husband was the stupidest girl in the world, and that to the end at least she was the most interesting, moved to the piano, where she proceeded to delight her audience with some very well-executed music, leaving Griffiths to congratulate himself on the admirable manner in which he had contrived to baffle her curiosity. She was greatly mistaken, certainly, in the idea she had got into her head.

After the first surprise and confusion at finding herself once more alone with the man for whom she had formerly cared so dearly, and after she had got over the indignant feeling his words had excited, Clara thought no more of him; he had so completely lost his hold over her heart, that she talked, and laughed, and chatted with the company as gaily and unconcernedly as though he were not present; and though perhaps her eyes shone a little brighter, her laugh rang out a little more frequently, it was more from natural excitement caused by the events of the day, and an equally natural desire


to be brilliant before him who had despised her, than from any remains of the old love, so long ago burnt out by the fire of other sorrows.

He, on the contrary, felt that he had never valued or admired her as she deserved; now that she was utterly and hopelessly out of his reach, now when he saw that his old hold over her had so weakened and faded away that it could never be re-established, he began to feel how great his mistake had been in rejecting the love he might have won, in undervaluing the beauty and worth of the woman who had as much power to charm him now, after the lapse of so long a time, as she had when first he saw her. His eyes followed her everywhere, even when he was talking sheep and mining to Mr. Joyce, or thanking pretty Mrs. Hamilton for her dashing concert-pieces; and when, afterwards, Clara sat down and sang with the feeling and passion of former times, his thoughts roamed away from the present, with its difficulties and dangers, to the by-gone years when he had last heard her rich, sweet voice, and when the love he now craved had been won and rejected. He was almost beside himself with mingled sorrow and rapture as she ceased singing; he




was only conscious that it was not safe he should go near her, for he should certainly betray himself; so he retired into a window, and leaning out of it, listened, as she, at the solicitations of those around, continued singing. Even the money-troubles, serious and overwhelming as they were, did not annoy him when he heard her voice; and when the evening was over, and he rode quietly home, the notes still rang in his ears, and kept him company in the solitude.

When in his own room that night at the hotel the events of the day passed in review before him—the remembrance of the Chinamen and their money came upon him with a shock, as he realized what the consequences would be if he failed to meet their demands. It would have been possible to throw discredit on their statements, perhaps, and so get out of the matter altogether; he felt he would gladly have pursued such a course, in spite of the tone in which he had spoken to Miss Singleton that evening, but then there was the receipt. "That confounded receipt!" he swore under his breath. His handwriting was unmistakeable; and the production of that slip of paper would be quite enough to prove his guilt.



He must set matters right somehow; he was getting on well here, and did not wish to be forced to fly. Now indeed he had more inducement than ever to remain; and he could not bear to think that Clara should ever really learn to look upon him as the evil-doer he had described himself to be that evening in his conversation with her. It is one thing to accuse yourself of misdoing whilst expressing sorrow and the desire for amendment, and quite another thing to be pointed out by a thousand eager fingers, when standing in the dock to be tried for a crime against which every voice is raised, and the probable inducements to and consequences of which are discussed by every fire-side and in every house in the country. She must not hear him branded as a thief and a criminal, even though he should be so in reality; in her eyes he must never lose his position. Even while he thought thus a feeling very like contempt for himself passed through his mind as he reflected that though he tried to persuade himself he desired to keep his name clear for her sake only, yet, had she not been there, he would have been just as eager to escape from the danger that threatened him for his own.

He certainly was a curious mixture, this man, and yet there are many like him in that respect in the world. He liked to envelop his actions in a disguise of specious excuses, and then he would himself tear away the covering with which he had surrounded them, and laugh at its sophistry. Thus he sneered at himself for putting Clara Singleton forward as the excuse for his anxiety to get out of his difficulties, and still he continued to try to persuade himself she was the power that influenced him in his decisions. For after long and careful thought he decided on a plan—or rather he did not decide on it, but in a vague, dim form it began to take root in his head. Dangerous though it was, nothing better presented itself, and he had passed safely through so many dangers now, he began to have faith in his luck, and to count that it would bear him through this as well as it had done through the others. Next morning he was to be paid £2,000, to send back to Green Creek by the escort. He was supposed to count over the money, to see that the sum was correct, and then, after making it into a parcel, he was to seal it with the Government seal, and forward it at once to Green



Creek. If he should pay the Chinamen with these notes, how could he account for the deficit when the money reached its destination? This consideration puzzled him for a long time, but at length he began to see how he could manage the matter. If the parcel arrived at Green Creek with the seal unbroken, his speculations would at once be discovered, as he was the person who had last counted the notes, and who had sealed them without making any complaint or remonstrance, which he would have done had the sum not been correct; but if when the parcel arrived the seal had in any way been injured or tampered with, the blame would then be shifted from him to the escort to whose charge he had confided the parcel with the seal intact. The thing now to be arranged was how he should get an opportunity of breaking the seal, after it had been delivered into the hands of the escort. He had not intended to return with them to Green Creek, and had told many people so, but it was evident that to accomplish his object he must at least go part of the way back with them. That would be easy—he would have to make some excuse about the unsettled state of the country, and go with

them under pretext of affording them protection. It could be managed, he thought; and satisfied that he had at last found a way out of his troubles, he turned in, never for one minute bestowing a thought upon what might be the consequences of his scheme to the two men who acted as escort for the money back to Green Creek. No doubt he told himself it was their business to look out for themselves; he had never been remarkable for consideration for those whom he thought beneath him in the social scale, though his manner towards them was so bland and conciliatory as to hide the fact that he generally carried his own point without regard to their feelings.

## CHAPTER VIII.

IT was a busy morning, the one following the day on which occurred the events related in the last chapter. The Commissioner received the £2,000 sent him from the bank, and when he had taken it up into his own room, he did several things with it that would have astonished the bank officials could they have seen him. He took a large sum from the general amount, and divided it into three portions, rolling up each bundle of notes as he sorted it out, and writing the name of the Chinaman to whom he was about to pay it on the back of the outside note; after which he tied each parcel up neatly in a little roll. He then took the remainder of the money, did it up carefully, and sealed it with the official seal; after which he sent for the escort, and ordered them to be ready to start early next day.

"I hear," he added, as the men were leaving,


after having received their orders, "that the country is unsettled, and that there are rangers about. There's a good sum going back—2,000*l*. in notes and coin—and I think I had better go with you part of the way, to make everything safe. I can go as far as Mr. Moore's station, then you will be only a day's march from Green Creek, and I think you will be able to take care of yourselves for that bit."

"Tain't anyways necessary, sir, to come with us," replied one of the men. "My mate and me we're a match for four or five rangers; and they're not that bad that we'd be afraid of them. What do you say, Bill?"

"There's no need for the Commissioner," replied Bill. "I warrant we'll bring the notes back safe enough. There's no call for anyone to go out of their way about this job."

Griffiths laughed good-humouredly.

"I know you're two as brave fellows as ever lived, but you might be overpowered, or taken by surprise by the bushrangers, and if there were three or four to one, all your courage would do you little good. You'll be none the worse off for another man; and I don't mind the trouble, so that everything gets back right.



I'll go with you, as I said, as far as Mr. Moore's."

The men left without saying anything further, but as they went into the street the one who had been addressed as Bill spoke :

"What the dickens is the Commissioner at now? There ain't no call for him going along of we; and it's none too pleasant to have him stuck beside us always."

"He's up to some game," answered the other, oracularly. "I don't yet see what it is rightly; but we'll catch him out some day, I makes no doubt. It's all humbug about the rangers—there ain't none here now, since that last gang was done for awhile ago."

"Hulloa!" cried a man, riding by in the uniform of a police-officer, reining up in front of the discontented couple, "you're the two men who brought down the gold from Green Creek—can you tell me if the Commissioner is up at the hotel? I was just going to see him."

"You'll find him there," answered Bill, very sulkily, jerking his head back in the direction of the hotel—"wish you may keep him there, too," he added, as the officer rode on, and disappeared round the corner of the street.

Mr. Fane, the lieutenant of police, dismount-



ed at the door, and went up to see Griffiths. On his way he passed in the corridor three Chinamen, and as they were dirty and greasy-looking, he wondered what they had been doing, and how they obtained admittance. When he entered Griffiths' room, he exclaimed against them, saying that it must be a great nuisance to people in the hotel if men of that class were admitted.

Griffiths laughed at Fane's disgust and indignation. "They were doing no harm," he said—"they only came to see me. They had given me some money to keep for them, and they called to get it back."

Fane whistled; he was thinking, if he had money he wanted kept, his friend the Commissioner was the last person to whose care he should entrust it. He had heard stories from Green Creek relative to the Commissioner's expenditure—his extravagance, his expensive way of living; he had often joined with others in wondering how he did it, and following the good colonial maxim of believing every man to be a knave until he is proved to be a fool, he thought he should not be in a hurry to give his friend any such touching mark of confidence as

these Chinamen had just done. However, he allowed his feelings to escape in a very cleverly-whistled melody, the execution of which was rather intricate, and gave him time to recollect where he was, and what he was about, before he spoke again; then he said,

"Never mind the Chinamen; what I wanted to see you for was to know if you would come and dine with me to-morrow; I've got one or two good fellows coming, and we'll have a jolly evening."

"What a confounded nuisance it is that I must be off to-morrow!" replied Griffiths. "I am going part of the way back with the escort, and so I shan't be able to make one at your dinner. I'm very sorry, but I can't help it—duty before pleasure, you know."

"Hang duty!" answered Fane, irreverently. "I don't mean that. It isn't a bad thing sometimes, but it's carrying it a little too far to go humbugging about after that escort, when you're not in the least wanted. You're not generally so anxious to take care of them."

"That's true. I think it's a bore having to go with them, I can tell you, but they're taking back a large sum this time, and if the waggon

was attacked two men have not much chance of being able to defend it. I go as far as Moore's Station with them, pass the night there, and return next day; they will then be only one day from Green Creek, and can surely manage that themselves. Of course, if the country is not quiet I may have to go the whole way, but I hope I shan't be obliged to do that."

"Rubbish!" ejaculated Fane, emitting a thin blue line of smoke from his lips, as he removed his cigar while speaking. "The country's quieter than it ever was, your men are fully armed, and why they can't do without you as well now as any other time I can't think. But I see it's no use arguing the point with you, escort duty is your present hobby, and escort duty you will do, whether it's necessary or not. I hope you'll like it, and that your camp out tomorrow evening with Messrs. Bill and Jim will be as pleasant as my little dinner, with all the best fellows in B—— as guests."

Thus speaking, and feeling a little put out at not being able to obtain the presence of the pleasantest man about town at his table next evening, young Fane took his departure, and only partially recovered his equanimity on find-


ing that the Chinamen he so strongly objected to had disappeared, and that the corridors were no longer contaminated by their presence.

"I wonder what Griffiths is up to?" he mused. "It's all humbug that about his being wanted with the escort. The men with the gold are quite enough to defend it; and for all he's so pleasant, I don't doubt they are every bit as trustworthy as he. I should say he'd some little game up, and that he's not going with the waggon at all; or, if he does go, it's only for a short way, to put people off the scent. How about that pretty Mrs. Hamilton? I should never be surprised to hear they had eloped; and Hamilton is away now. I shouldn't wonder if there was something in that; but if so, there's nothing I can do, as it's only a guess of mine. I'll hear all about it, no doubt, before long. Perhaps they'll employ the police to arrest the fugitives." And laughing at this idea, he mounted his horse and rode off.

"Hang the fellow, what did he mean by coming then?" growled Griffiths, as he watched his visitor caracole down the street, in a manner that showed off his fine figure and horsemanship to perfection. "Had he been a minute or

two earlier he would have seen me paying those Chinese fellows, and might have got an idea of what was the matter, when the money was reported missing. I think now, however, he suspects nothing."

Infatuated man, blind to all that was passing around him, unable to see that even those who sought his society, and partook of his hospitality, suspected him, and looked with distrust on every action of his life. The ancients said truly, "*Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat.*" He had indeed been blinded not to perceive the meaning of the looks directed at him, of the glances exchanged among even the lowest of his subordinates; he did not recognize the fact that he had come to be regarded in the colony as a man who spent a great deal more than his income, and yet did not seem to be in difficulties; he was indeed estimated as a very smart customer, one so smart that he would overreach himself some of these days, and come to smash. In fact people were beginning to fight a little shy of him; they apprehended he must be in trouble before long, and as rats fly from a falling house, so they avoided any close intimacy with the handsome Commissioner, whose affairs



must be hopelessly involved ere this, though he did not seem to suffer any inconvenience from that state of things. The police—his own old comrades and subordinates—talked over the matter often, shaking their heads gravely at it, wondering when the end would come, and they should be employed to catch him, after he had absconded with as much of the Government gold as he could carry.

“Mark my words,” Fane would say to Sergeant Wilson, an ex-cavalry man, who had come out to the diggings, and who, having lost instead of made money there, had subsequently enrolled himself in the force, “our Commissioner is going to the bad; he leads far too jolly a life to be a safe hand over that gold chest. Some fine day the Green Creek people will awake up to find it empty, and our friend Griffiths nowhere.”

“You’re right, sir,” answered Wilson, respectfully. “No doubt he’ll have plenty of gold *cachéd* away where he can get at it handy, and he’ll take as much with him as he can carry. A grand robbery it’ll be, sir, or he’ll not do it at all; he’s one of those chaps that’ll do nothing on a small scale. If he ever gets the halter, depend on it he’ll deserve it.”

Wilson's eyes sparkled with genuine appreciation of Griffiths' genius for crime, and he seemed to look forward to being employed in the hunt after so daring a criminal, as we in England would look forward to a soft mid-winter day, and to flying along on a good horse over a stiff country, well up, with the hounds running on a burning scent. He was a man who had been in a good position, and well-to-do at home, and no doubt had often enjoyed such a run; but now, to his mind, there was no hunt so exciting, no chase that could equal the pursuit of a fellow-creature over the wild, arid plains and tangled scrub of the Australian wilderness.

Thus was Griffiths discussed, unknown to himself, in every tavern and place of meeting in the country; wherever his name was mentioned, there were stories to tell of his extravagant mode of living, of his balls, his picnics, his horses, his high play—for even rumours of that had oozed out—and altogether his credit was in a shaky condition; but as long as he could continue his entertainments, and avoid his wrong-doing, if wrong-doing there was, being discovered, all the world was still ready to accept his hospitality, and meet his advances

in a friendly spirit, though mentally keeping themselves so far clear of him as to be able to turn their backs on him at a minute's notice.

All unconscious of this state of feeling in those around, he went out, and passed the evening very agreeably. He was in high spirits; he had paid off his debts altogether, for he counted on being certainly able to damage the seals of the parcel of money on its way up to the bank at Green Creek; he had no doubt about being able to do that, and what was more, he had fully determined that nothing should prevent him accomplishing his object. Having gone so far, there was no retreat for him, and fully resolved that he would succeed in his perilous undertaking, he came in early and retired to rest. He must be up betimes to-morrow, and he was determined that he should be fresh and vigorous, with all his faculties about him, ready to take advantage of any opportunity that might present itself for the carrying out of his purpose.

At daybreak he was astir, and shortly after the waggon and escort halted in the street below, and sent up word to say they were



ready. He ordered them to drive on, saying he would be after them presently, and hastily swallowing his breakfast, he mounted his horse, and followed them. They had driven fast, evidently, for it was an hour or more before he overtook them, and they had long left all traces of the town and its inhabitants behind them. The road was execrable, which he did not so much mind, being on horseback, but it was truly wonderful to see the progress of the waggon, now springing up into the air over a tussock, then settling down into a deep rut, caused by one of the heavy bullock-drays that traverse those roads, taking stores up to the outlying stations. Sometimes they crossed a grassy, undulating, park-like country, dotted plentifully with old scraggy trees; and in such landscapes a flock of sheep or a herd of wild, long-horned cattle were no unfrequent adjuncts to the picture; then they would penetrate into a forest—the bush, strictly speaking—where the trees were tall, spindly, with no leaves to speak of, throwing scant shade on the panting horses and the bronzed, weather-beaten faces of the men; sometimes the undergrowth was thick and tangled, except where the high road

had been cut through, and the plants and bushes thickly interlaced that formed the scrub were gay with a profusion of brilliant-coloured flowers, scentless for the most part, but very beautiful notwithstanding.

The Commissioner was well accustomed to the sight of Nature's beauties in these out-of-the-way districts, and he was not the kind of man to go into rhapsodies over a handful of wild-flowers; the shade was more provoking than the full glare of the sun, it was such a deceptive mockery; his companions were neither lively nor intelligent, and he was haunted by visions of the cool, clear, sparkling bitter ale that would have been so grateful at that moment to his parched palate, and that he could have obtained at the hotel at B——. Altogether, he was not in a very good temper when they reached the outskirts of the forest, and prepared to cross a wide level plain, bounded in the distance by low hills, and that was of so soft and sandy a nature that the wheels sank in the soil, and added greatly to the weight of the draught. Seeing this, and noticing that it was now near midday, Griffiths called a halt, to rest the horses before their

undertaking so severe a pull ; and while they were being baited, he proposed to the men that they should make some tea, he, in the meantime, sitting under the cover of the waggon, and near the box that contained the parcel of notes, on which he so much longed to be able to lay his hands, if only for a few minutes. But though the men assented willingly to this proposition, and one of them set immediately about lighting a fire and getting tea ready, the other took out his pipe, and hitching himself up on the front of the vehicle, composed himself into a state of repose between sleeping and waking, that was sufficiently wide-awake to prevent any attempt on the part of the Commissioner to execute his project. How he cursed and swore inwardly, as he felt Jim's half-closed eye was keeping wakeful watch on him ! He was half inclined to go out and walk about—anything to get out of the way of the man that he knew suspected him ; but he remembered if he was so easily discouraged, his project would never be accomplished, and his fate depended on its proper execution. So he sat quietly, himself half asleep, and after awhile his patience was near being rewarded ; Bill, who

was gathering sticks for his fire, had inadvertently trodden on a nest of bull-dog ants, and his cries as they swarmed around him, and one or two managed to catch hold of some part of his person, caused Jim to jump down and run to his rescue. He had no sooner approached his comrade, who, by this time, had got clear of his enemies, than Bill said, in a low, angry tone,

“Have you left him alone there? Go back, and keep your eye on him; he’s up to something, for sure.”

Thus ordered, and finding his companion had succeeded in exterminating the few ants that had taken hold of him, Jim hurried back; but though he found the Commissioner had altered his position, and was resting against the box containing the parcel of notes, nothing seemed to have been touched. When the tea was made, Bill brought it over to the waggon, and they all refreshed themselves together.

The fact of the matter was that Griffiths, profiting by Bill’s absence, had approached the chest, of which he had a key, and was about to unlock it and effect his object, when he heard the man’s returning footstep. There was no time to do anything, and he was barely able to

throw himself into a reclining position, with his head resting against the chest, when Bill returned, as before mentioned. Griffiths swore to himself a few oaths that would not have been good to hear. It was quite evident these fellows suspected him, and were determined he should not get the opportunity he desired; but he clenched his teeth savagely as he resolved that, no matter what was the cost, he would achieve the purpose for which he had set out on this journey, and woe be to the man who should cross his path, or think to turn him from his point!

The bush and desert were both intensely still in the sultry noontide heat, far and wide nothing could be heard but the shrill, aggravating monotonous chirrup of the grasshopper, nothing could be seen but their small encampment, and the busy forms of the horses as they wandered about seeking a mouthful of herbage, or a little more shade under some more spreading or better-furnished tree. All was glaring, sultry, desolate, and it was made no better to Griffiths by his having for companions people not only uncongenial, but antipathetic. He yawned, fidgeted, and wearied, but ended by falling asleep

from sheer *ennui*. When he awoke the sun was a little lower, the men were putting to the horses, and it was time for him to mount and pursue his way. On they went slowly and wearily over what seemed an interminable plain, the horses pulling the waggon through the yielding sandy track with great effort; towards sunset they again approached a wooded country, and camped for the night by an almost dry water-hole.

Here again the vigilance of the escort foiled the Commissioner, who, raging inwardly, became more pleasant and friendly with the men than was his wont, plying them with spirits, of which he had a private store, in the hope that the temptation might prove too much for them, and that they would succumb speedily to its influence. But they were old hardened bush-campaigners, and but that it made them slightly more hilarious than usual, it would have been impossible to guess that they had been indulging in some of the strongest brandy to be procured in B——, though not of the best quality, as it had been bought for this special purpose. They laughed and chatted, and told stories, and got on terms of very good fellow-

ship with the "guv'nor," as they called him; but to make them stupidly drunk, or even to send them off to sleep, was out of his power, as after a time Jim, nodding with tipsy gravity to his comrade, said—

"That's enough now, Bill; we've our work to do, and watch to keep, for fear the rangers should come by and rob the waggon. Do you turn in, and I'll keep a look-out till it's time to call you up."

Obedient to his comrade's orders, Bill rolled himself in his blanket, and was soon snoring loudly; while Griffiths, feeling that his project was in that instance frustrated, packed up the remainder of his brandy, and lay down likewise, raging at the unexpected aspect affairs had taken, and turning over in his mind how he should carry out his plans.

All at once a thought darted through his brain, emanating from the same evil counsellor that had led him into this trouble. But this time he did not, as formerly, try to stifle its voice, or turn away from its suggestions; on the contrary, he listened to them eagerly, and began to devise how it might be possible to carry them out. These men would not let him

accomplish his object. Well, in that case, he must do it in spite of them ; he was, it is true, but one to two of them, and his safety could only be ensured by their death ; but he was well-armed, and taking them by surprise, it would be very easy to do for them both before they had time to make any resistance. If he should be driven to this extremity, he must not shrink from the deed ; so only could he secure his retaining his office, and prevent the robberies of which he had been guilty from being discovered. He had not gone so far, to hesitate or turn back now, when the way of escape, though desperate, was open to him. He lay in the quiet night with his dark face turned up to the deep, blue vault of sky above him, a dangerous look gathering and growing in his bold handsome eyes, and on his scowling brow, as he watched the silent figure alert and sleepless by the fireside. But first, before he resorted to any such measures, he would go on with them next day, and see what chance might throw in his way ; many little things might happen that would put the escort off their guard, and leave him the desired opportunity ; and if his purpose could be effected without bloodshed, so much the better for him,



as he had no desire to commit murder, unless driven to do it for his own preservation.

Next day went off something like the first, only they passed more people as they journeyed along; sometimes it was a surveying party, wearily dragging interminable lengths of chain after them, and marking the trees as they went; sometimes a party of people stripping box-bark, taking off large sheets of bark, and working away in the glowing sunlight, as though they did not much mind it. As noon drew on, however, they halted with one of these parties, who were about to cook their midday meal, and who, with the usual hospitality of the bush, invited the travellers to share with them. This the escort, Jim and Bill, were very willing to do, and Griffiths, hoping it might draw them away from the waggon, was glad to join them also; but if he had hoped much from the excitement and distraction of fresh company as an inducement to his men to relax their watch, he was grievously disappointed. They kept as close to their charge as ever, and it was he who was finally compelled to abandon all hope of doing what he wanted at that time.

Later in the day, when they were again pur-

suing their journey, he turned the matter over in his mind. As long as he remained with them, there was no hope of these men relaxing their vigilance ; but when once he was gone, they would very probably be much more careless in the watch they kept over the gold-chest. He could see quite plainly it was of him they were suspicious, and he ground his teeth as he thought of it, while comforting himself by the reflection that, in whatever way he accomplished his project, they would suffer by it ; for if he succeeded in damaging the seal without their knowledge, they would be suspected and punished ; whilst, if he was driven to the last dreadful extreme, which he sincerely wished to avoid, they would pay with their lives for their pertinacious mistrust of their chief.

The water-pool near which they purposed to camp for the night was a little off the main road, and about three miles from Mr. Moore's station. This gentleman was a friend of Griffiths, and at his house the Commissioner designed to pass the night. This design he now communicated to his companions, telling that the country seemed so quiet that, as they had now passed the worst part of the way, he imagined they had no

longer need of him ; that he should leave them, and spend the night at the squatter's station, from whence he should return next morning to B——.

“And,” he added, “as I shall be able to get as much as I want in the way of drink up there, I'll leave the remainder of my brandy to you—it may be useful.”

This was an afterthought ; it had suddenly occurred to him that, he being absent, they might indulge more copiously than they had the night before, in which case they were likely to sleep soundly, from the combined effects of fatigue and liquor, a breach of discipline which even the one supposed to be on the watch might not be able to resist.

Glad to hear of his departure, and thinking that, whatever his reason for accompanying them might have been, their vigilance had foiled him, the men joyfully accepted his present, which indeed seemed to them a perfect treasure, and, eager to enter speedily into the enjoyment of it, they flogged on their flagging horses ; and before long arrived at the water by which they were to halt for the night. The sun was just setting, and Griffiths had to ride

on to his friend's house, so he did not delay long with his late companions, but set off briskly in the direction of the station. It was not very difficult to find the way, and he carefully took note of it as he rode along, because he intended to return that night, as it was above all things needful that he should be able to make his way there and back silently and rapidly. He received a hearty welcome from the squatter and his family, as indeed was not wonderful—his manner was so taking, his talk so easy and pleasant, his laugh so genial. He edified the ladies with descriptions of the latest B—— fashions, for, though the town was only two days' journey distant, it was quite a year since they had been down there. He chatted with the gentlemen about home and foreign politics, about the last election, and the fall in the price of wool, and altogether made himself so agreeable that everyone was sorry when he stated that he must return to B—— next day; finally Mr. Moore declared that in that case he would accompany him.

“I have long been intending to go to town,” said the wealthy squatter, “but it's such a journey I always put it off. With such pleasant

company as yours, however, Griffiths, it will not seem half as bad as usual, so I return with you."

After a little more conversation, Griffiths begged to be allowed to retire; he was tired, he said, with his day's ride, and as they would have an early start, and it was now after nine o'clock, he would be glad to get a little rest. This plea was readily allowed, and he went off immediately, begging that he might not be disturbed till just before they started next morning; as he was tired, he laughingly added, he hoped the start would not be a very early one. No sooner was he in his room, however, than his fatigue and weariness vanished. First he examined the door, tried the lock, and finding it a strong one, locked himself in. Then he looked out of the window, which was about three feet from the ground; finding everything quiet without, he slipped noiselessly out, having first armed himself with his revolver, and slunk away from the house, crouching behind bushes, and hiding in the shadows, till he was quite out of sight from the windows. Then he straightened himself up, and turning in the direction in which the camp from which he had come lay, he

set out with the firm determination to succeed in his object, and damage the seals of the parcel of money, no matter what happened. He was in a great hurry to get all over, and to be back at the station quickly. He did not know at what time Mr. Moore might take it into his head to start, and it behoved him to have the affair over, and be safely back, before people were astir, when he might run the risk of meeting some one as he was entering the house. He hurried along at his best speed, getting over the ground in first-rate style, and keeping his bearings so well, that in rather more than half an hour he perceived the light from the camp-fire shining through the trees to his left. Then he paused and approached the light with extreme precaution; nearer and nearer he crept, avoiding the slightest noise, and keeping in the shade of the massive tree-trunks, that he might see first without being seen.

It was as he had anticipated. Overcome by liquor and fatigue, both men were sleeping soundly; one rolled up in his blankets, with his feet to the fire, and looking strangely like a corpse enveloped in his shroud, the other sitting, as if he had meant to be on the watch, but sleep

having stolen upon him, his head had fallen forward on his breast, and his hands were resting idly in his lap. Everything looked well for Griffiths' plan; near by stood the waggon, the light of the fire streaming in under the covering, and showing plainly the chest in which the gold had been brought from Green Creek, and which was now returning empty, save for the parcel of notes inside. Noiselessly the Commissioner stole nearer; noiselessly he entered the waggon, put his key into the lock of the box, and turned it. The lock worked very quietly; the lid was raised, the parcel was taken out, when just as Griffiths was about to destroy the seals, a movement near the fire attracted his attention. He raised his eyes, and met those of the man Jim fixed upon him, while their owner was in the act of putting out his hand to grasp the ever-ready revolver lying at his side. Quick as his stealthy movement was, that of Griffiths was quicker—his pistol was out in a minute, and the sharp explosion followed. When the smoke rolled away, the doubled-up figure that had fallen half into the fire revealed at once the fate of that opponent. But the report had awakened the other man, Bill—not at first rousing him quite

effectually, as from where he lay both Jim and Griffiths were invisible, but it was evident in a few seconds more he would sit up and discover what had happened.

His revolver was lying near him—he must never be allowed to grasp it, and his unseen enemy raised his weapon again, took aim, and fired. This time the powder was damp, or something was wrong, for the pistol hung fire, while Bill, whose faculties were returning, sat up, and reached towards his revolver. In another second he would have held it and been safe, but before he could lay hands on it a dark figure rushed forward, snatched it up, a report followed, and Bill fell back heavily, dead, near his comrade, whose loss he had not had time to discover.

When the deed was done, and Griffiths stood alone with the dead, slain by his hand in so cowardly and treacherous a manner, the first feeling that possessed him was not one of horror, remorse, or shame—it was simply one of pure physical fear. Had the pistol shots aroused anyone? and in that case, was there a chance that he would be discovered and punished for the murder? He drew back under the shadow




of the waggon, and listened for any sound borne on the night air that might warn him of the approach of people coming to discover the cause of the shots; but no sound reached his ears, save the noise of the horses near by cropping the stunted grass, stamping now and then when assailed by some prowling night-fly, and the crackling of the fire as it leaped from one log to the other. Then an odour began to rise on the night-air that recalled him to himself, and warned him that time was passing, and he had better do his business and be gone.

The smell that so suddenly aroused him from his trance of fear was the odour of burnt flesh; Jim had fallen partly into the fire, and the flame had already made havoc with the strong body lately so full of health and life. Something in the sight shocked and revolted Griffiths; he had committed two murders with as much coolness as though he were killing a sheep for his dinner, but it horrified him to see the body of the man, so treacherously slain, devoured by the keen eager quivering tongues of fire that gleamed and flickered around it. He went over and pulled the body away, rolling it up in the blanket which he found lying near; he then ap-

proached the other, and covered him in the same manner. That done, he entered the waggon, put his key into his pocket, took his revolver in his hand, the parcel of notes under his arm, and returned as fast as possible to Mr. Moore's station. He had been away just two hours when he again entered his room. The whole household seemed to have gone to rest, and everything was buried in profound silence. He placed the bundle of notes in his valise, took off his clothes and lay down to sleep, as though the expedition on which he had just been engaged, and its result, was one of no more importance than a kangaroo hunt. But tired though he was, and hardened in evil-doing, still he did not find he could so easily drive from his mind the remembrance that he had just killed two of his fellow-creatures; and that not in fair fight and in self-defence, but cruelly, treacherously, their awakening out of sleep being the signal for their death. This was not the first time he had killed a man; black fellows he had shot down again and again, thinking no more of it than he would have thought of shooting a rat, and white men also had fallen before his unerring aim before now; but then they were

bush-rangers, men attacked for violation of the law. They too had always been well armed and in superior numbers; it was a case of fair fighting, and the best man wins, as in a battle. But here it was all different, and the more he tried to persuade himself that it was a case of necessity, and one that concerned his life, the more he felt that the excuse, however plausible, was a sophistry—that his crimes alone had led to their death, and this last and greatest of his evil-doings.


The whole scene would repeat itself over and over again in his mind. Whenever he fell asleep, as he did every now and then, he seemed to be again creeping through the trees up to the camp-fire, again kneeling in the waggon beside the chest, with the notes in his hand; then he would see the keen gleaming eyes fixed on him, grasp instinctively at his revolver, cover them, and then would follow the report; as the sound seemed to echo around him he would awake with a start, to find himself lying in bed under Mr. Moore's roof, with the remembrance, instead of the reality, of his crime present with him. He got angry with himself, saying it was foolish, weak, sentimental, to go over and over a thing



that was done, that could not be helped, and that he would do again in the same cause; but though he reasoned thus, the ghastly scene repeated incessantly preyed on his nerves, and he could not get the rest he desired and so much wanted. It cannot be, he thought, that I am so foolish as to act like the murderers one reads about in story-books, who betray their crimes by want of nerve and courage; after all, it is no worse than shooting a ranger, and quite as much in self-defence. "I'll not brood over it any longer, or I shall get into a morbid state, like the fools one hears of, and perhaps act as stupidly as they." Thus thinking, he shut his eyes on the dawning light, and went off again in the soundest and least broken sleep he had enjoyed that night.

## CHAPTER IX.

ALL these weary years Mrs. Mounteagle had remained in her little shop, in the quiet back-street in Melbourne; year by year her business got larger, year by year she put by money, and year by year her hope of ever seeing her husband again faded away. We have seen how she met Mrs. Grant, and became acquainted with the manner in which he had acted both towards herself, and also towards the innocent and unsuspecting woman who believed herself to be his wife. Ethel's high spirit, though greatly broken and toned down since all the trials of her life had come upon her, rose when she knew this, and she determined never to seek him out, never to endeavour to renew those feelings in his heart which he had once professed to feel for her, and which had endured the trials and hardships of the world for such a



very short time. If he should ever come to her in want and distress, well and good ; she would then assist and relieve him, she would forgive him his misdeeds and wrong-doing, and take him once more to the heart that, however cold and selfish, had in truth cared for none but him, and had loved him with as much love as it was capable of feeling. She saved up money against this day, which she hoped would come ; but as time rolled on and still no tidings reached her, she ceased to care about the matter, and absorbed herself in her business, and in the friends that she had collected about her during her long residence in Victoria.

She had a good many friends now—people who, like herself, had seen better days, and yet were content to work for their living, as they never had expected to work when they first came out there. Then, once or twice a year, some of her old sailor-acquaintances would turn up, and she would have a chat over old times.

In the meantime, away north, in Sydney, Mrs. Grant was leading a quiet, retired life ; the memory of her second husband was bitter to her, with a bitterness that even cooking could not alleviate ; there are sorrows too deep

to be touched by sauces, and this was one of them. In her foolish, good-natured way, she had loved the handsome miner, and was cut to the heart by the manner in which he had treated her during their last interview. She was a practical person, however, and had been brought up in a practical school, and she reasoned that for the loss of a second husband there could be no cure but the marrying of a third, and to that object she devoted herself after her return from B——. She could never quite forget that good-looking and good-for-nothing man whom she had believed to be her second husband; but neither he nor anyone else should guess how deeply his desertion had wounded her. There were many men in and about Sydney that she had known when he lived there with her, and these, supposing her husband dead in the Bush, and that his bones whitened the grass under the low-growing scrub, began to gather around the portly widow, who had so soon thrown off her mourning, and who, it was rumoured, had a good deal of money remaining, though Grant, poor fellow, had made the yellow boys fly in good style, no doubt.

Our story does not follow the fortunes of Mrs.



Grant, who soon fixed what remained of her fancy and affections on a Mr. Beecher, a gentleman who had been a close friend of Grant's, and who was sufficiently well off to make it probable the widow's little remaining money was not the only reason for his admiration of her. There we leave her, hoping that, in this her last venture on matrimonial seas, she was more fortunate than in the one immediately preceding, and that the happy days spent with old Pat Murtagh revived for her and James Beecher.

Clara Singleton after the memorable day when she met Herbert Mouteagle again under the name of Griffiths, had fought very shy of her cousin, Mrs. Hamilton. That young lady, always of too lively a style to please the more sedate English girl, asked such a number of questions as to how Clara had liked Mr. Griffiths, what he had said to her during their half-hour in the garden, what she had said to him, &c., that Clara began to look upon her in the light of a persecutor, and to feel that the subject had been deprived of all interest with which the romance of the meeting, so far away from home and all their early surroundings, might have invested it. Besides,



Sophy Hamilton passed a large portion of each day in dilating on the merits and perfections, mental and physical, of her Commissioner, as she called him. Now Clara did not consider his mental qualifications of a very desirable order, though she was willing to acknowledge she had once been dazzled by their brilliancy. That he was tall and handsome was undeniable, but she was not a person who attached much value to good looks in a man, and could not understand the importance with which her cousin invested them; then, no matter how completely her wound was healed—no matter how thoroughly she had lived down her weakness—it was not pleasant to hear the man whom she had once looked upon as her own, and suffered for having so looked upon him, appropriated exclusively by another. On the whole, a knowledge of his presence near her in Queensland did not conduce to her happiness; even her cousin's selfish good-nature could not prevent Clara from feeling something very nearly approaching to aversion for the hair-brained girl who both talked and acted in an incomprehensibly wild manner, and who asserted her claim to the handsome Commissioner so openly.

"She forgets she is married," soliloquised Clara, indignantly. "I don't know how people stand that kind of thing here, but no one seems to mind it. At home it would not be so, I know. Perhaps I am censorious," she would continue, reproving herself; "the fact of people taking it in that way shows that they have a good opinion of her, and don't take her wild talk literally; but she wearies me with it."

Thus thought Clara Singleton, sitting alone in her room working, the day but one after she had met and been introduced to Mr. Griffiths. Even whilst she was thinking, a quick step sounded outside her door, which was thrown suddenly open, and Mrs. Hamilton came in.

"I say, isn't it too bad?" she cried. "He's gone, and we've hardly seen him. It was you frightened him off, Clara."


"Who do you mean?" asked Clara, looking up placidly. She was getting accustomed to the Hamilton incursions into her room at all possible hours of the day and night, and sometimes found them amusing, if she happened to be in want of anyone to talk to, or if the intruder was in an entertaining vein.

"My Commissioner, of course. Who else

should I mean? It's really too bad, as Hamilton will be back in a day or two, and then I shall have to be on my good behaviour, as he is sometimes jealous when I indulge in hero-worship. So absurd! As if it could have anything to do with him. I tell him he's not a hero; but he doesn't seem to believe it, and thinks I ought to make as much fuss about him as I do about that darling Mr. Griffiths."

"Very right of him too," answered Clara. "You really talk a great deal of nonsense about that man, and he's not worth it. What would you do if you found him not as good as you suppose?—not worth your hero-worship, in fact."

"Ah! that's it, you see. You don't understand my feeling with regard to him. I don't believe him to be good at all—I think him wicked enough for anything, and clever enough to keep out of mischief, in spite of his wickednesses. I don't know that I like good people—they're hard and cold—you're one of them, Clara; and you're just like them, you can't sympathise with the little sins that are the result of a weak nature, or the natural product of a strong one, that has bad qualities as fully



developed as good ones. I shouldn't care for him one bit if I thought him good, steadfast, and unapproachable. It is just because I believe him to be a creature like myself, only with faults and failings much stronger and more intense than my own, that I admire him so much. If he is moved to do good, he will do it better than I could ; if he does evil, he will transcend anything I could effect in that line. To be short, it is the power of his nature I worship, not the perfection ; and I fancy there are many women of my mind."

Clara sighed a little, but so slightly that Sophy did not perceive it. There was truth in her cousin's observations, and she remembered when she had felt something very similar, only, to do her justice, the evil principle, however powerful, would, had she recognised it, never have had attractions for her. It was because she believed him worthy of love and honour that she had made her hero of him, and now, when she knew him, and saw what an image of clay her idol had been, it was cast down from its pedestal in her heart, and, shattered by the fall, could never be restored or replaced.

"You may be right in what you say," Clara

replied presently. "I don't profess to be skilled in knowledge of the heart, but I thought respect was necessary to love, and how can you respect if you believe a man capable of evil-doing?"

Sophy Hamilton laughed.

"What a queer girl you are!" she said. "I don't think respect has anything to do in any of the numerous love-matches with which I am acquainted; and as to believing a man capable of evil-doing, I should like to see the man that wasn't. After all, we're all alike—human nature's the same in men and women. Given the temptation equally strong, and suited to every different nature, and how many are there, do you think, who would resist it? Of course no two people, perhaps, will feel the same temptation equally; but everyone has his or her price; and it is great virtue indeed that is not to be bought over in any way. As I said before, if such a being could be found, he'd have no sympathy with us erring mortals, and would certainly be cold and forbidding."

"There's a great deal in what you say about temptation," answered Clara. "Undoubtedly it is the key-note to character, and few withstand it successfully. It doesn't make it less one's

duty, however, to try to overcome it; I must maintain that the person who does so try is more worthy of praise and esteem than the one who makes his passions his excuse, and succumbs without a struggle."

"Very well," replied Mrs. Hamilton. "Of course you're right—you always are; and I know you're good enough for anything; but the fact of the matter is, I didn't come in here to have a metaphysical discussion, or whatever you may call this argument we've been having—I came to tell you that I'm going to ride home to-day, stop the night, and come back next day. I want you to come with me—I should be so fearfully dull by myself; and, moreover, you'll be a *chaperon*."

Clara hesitated—she was comfortable—she had letters to write to her uncle and to Slingsby, of whose death she was still in ignorance, and she felt in no mood for a gallop with her harum-scarum cousin. A thought decided her. She knew that although Sophy had escaped very well hitherto, still people talked of her *penchant* for the Commissioner; and if she was to go off to the country the very day he left B——, and return the day he came

back, it might cause remarks, there being always plenty of ill-natured people everywhere to comment on a coincidence like that. So she put up her work and got ready, wondering at her cousin's sudden move, which was presently explained by her saying,

"I think my Commissioner will be on his road home late to-morrow evening; it would be great fun if we could manage to hit off the exact time, and come home together."

That explained the mystery, and Clara laughed, as she hurried on her habit, to think how completely her shrewd cousin had betrayed herself, and she wondered whether Griffiths would feel pleased if he knew how entirely he occupied Mrs. Hamilton's thoughts. Of course he liked her, she told herself. Ethel Courtenay had been a woman very much in that style, and he had loved her; what more natural than that he should care for this pretty creature, to whom he had once been engaged, and who had plenty of cleverness and worldly wisdom to recommend her? And then she could have shaken herself, had such a thing been possible, for asking herself whom he was likely to care for. What was it to her? She had no interest in the matter


beyond what she might legitimately feel in her cousin, and that had nothing do with him.

If she had known how completely she had taken her old place, and more than her old place, in his regard, was it possible she should ever have come to feel for him again as she had once felt? We are told that the flame of a dead love cannot be re-kindled, and she was inclined to think so herself, but she was in a dangerous position, and a dangerous frame of mind, to renew the old intimacy with safety. Fortunately for her it was not destined that she should do so; their journey was not attended with the wished-for result, the ride home next day being unenlivened by the welcome appearance of the returning Commissioner. To Clara's great surprise, she perceived that not only did Sophy not seem put out by missing the companion she had sought, but that she consoled herself very thoroughly with the society of Mr. Fane, the police-officer, who overtook them soon after they set out, and rode with them the whole way home. It was very plain Sophy Hamilton would not break her heart, whatever happened, and that, in spite of her hero-worship, her husband had little cause for jealousy.



## CHAPTER X.

THE morning was tolerably far advanced before Griffiths awoke from the heavy sleep into which he had finally fallen, because Mr. Moore, mindful of his guest's parting words, had deferred his start till a later hour of the day than he would have chosen had he been consulting his own convenience only. It was already six o'clock when Griffiths awoke, and as he had expected to be aroused by five at the latest, he jumped out of bed in a great hurry, with a kind of vague feeling on his mind that something unpleasant had happened, with which he was in some way connected, though he could not exactly remember what it was. By degrees, however, as he hurried through his dressing, a remembrance of the whole dreadful deed returned to him; he recollected every little incident, even to the click of the trigger when he fired his revolver, and to his smashing the lock of the



chest with a stone, to lead to the idea that it had been broken into; everything came back upon his mind, but now, in the broad daylight, and refreshed by a good night's rest, he felt none of the sentimental horrors that had tormented him the night before—no useless remorse for having slain two men as it were in their sleep; the difference that he had seen last night between them and bushrangers, or black fellows, vanished in the clear light of day, and he was once more the calm, cool, relentless man that he generally was in his dealings with the world around him.

He was released now from all debts and difficulties; he had even money in his possession, but that was useless, and must be made away with as soon as possible. As he remembered this, he went over to see if it was safe in his valise. Yes, there it was, with the seals still untouched; and realizing how utterly useless it was to him, he did not care to open it, but restored it to its place, thinking that he must manage to secrete it in the bush on his way back to B——. He could fall behind Moore on some pretext or other, and stow it away in one of the innumerable hiding-places the bush affords. He felt quite light-hearted as he reflected how

little chance there was now of any of his misdeeds being discovered. It is true he could not help remembering the old proverb, "murder will out," but in this case there was really no apprehension of such a result. The deed had been done in a lonely, desolate spot, at dead of night, with no eye near to see, nor tongue to tell; and when the bodies should be found, as found they must be sooner or later, there would be no clue as to who had done the deed. Thinking thus, he dressed himself quickly, and going into the dining-room, found the master of the house just going to wake him.

"You must have slept well," he said, on seeing his guest, "and have had pleasant dreams, too, you seem so bright and lively this morning."

Griffiths laughed with a horrible consciousness of the change it would make in his friend's manner were he aware of what had passed that night; but his laugh, though forced, passed with his unobservant host for the real expression of careless light-heartedness, and he busied himself making his guest comfortable, and pressing him to eat in preparation for the long ride before them.

"We will do the longest half to-day," he

said. "I can't bear getting into B—— late, which would be the case if we only did the regular stage to-day. We're starting late now, so we shall have to press on, to reach our camping-ground before it gets dark. I've ordered the horses, and we'll go as soon as you're ready."


Thus urged, Griffiths swallowed his tea hurriedly, and himself carrying out his valise, strapped it behind him on his horse, declaring that servants never settled it to his liking, and that it was one of his hobbies to do that always for himself.

Settled it was at last, and they rode off nodding and smiling to the ladies, who had just made their appearance, and some of whom felt rather aggrieved that the master of the house should go to town and leave them at home. He was sure to bring them back something nice as a remembrance of his expedition; but that did not at all console those who wished to see the latest fashions, and to observe whether hair was dressed high or low, how many flounces were admissible in morning-dress, and whether crinolines were as large as ever. They had to content themselves, however, with what they

had learnt from Griffiths, and with giving Mr. Moore strict injunctions to pay special attention to the way the ladies dressed, and the things he saw in the shops in B——. . Poor Mr. Moore felt quite bewildered with all the orders he had received, and was only consoled by thinking that perhaps Griffiths would be good-natured enough to help him out of his difficulties, and assist him in choosing what he wanted for those left at home.

So they rode away in the golden morning light, their horses fresh and full of spirits, and they themselves so light-hearted, from very opposite causes, that when an old kangaroo darted out of the bush in front of them, and bounded away with his strange, swift gait, they could hardly restrain themselves from pursuing him, though they were minus dogs or any weapons that would have been available until they came to close quarters.

"After all, we couldn't have carried the venison with us," said Moore, with a slight sigh of regret, as he turned his horse again in the right direction, after gazing for a minute at the flying animal's lessening form, "so perhaps it's as well we couldn't kill it. I feel as I used to



feel when going on a spree as a young man; I suppose because I have been tied down at home so long. It seems as if I shall take to larking about B——, as wild as the youngest madcap there."


"And so you shall," answered Griffiths; "I'll take you about and show you all the sights of the place, and we'll have no end of fun."

He was quite as gay as his friend, and looked forward to amusing himself royally, now the incubus of those confounded money embarrassments was off his mind, and so they chatted and laughed, and Griffiths even sang, which he didn't do at all badly, as they went rapidly forward. They pressed their horses a good deal that day, yet it was just getting dark when they arrived at the place where they were to pass the night. It was a water-hole, with a few trees around it, in an open park-like country, and Griffiths, who had all day been seeking some opportunity to get rid of the notes in his valise, saw at once he should not be able to manage it here. The trees were so open, and the brushwood so scanty, that, even if he managed to stray away from his companion, his form would not be hidden, and besides it would be difficult

to get the notes out of the valise without attracting attention while his friend was by. He must endeavour next day to send Moore on in front, while he lingered behind and accomplished his object. They had a merry camp-fire that night, though there were only the two of them there. In after-days Moore often thought of it, and regretted plaintively that so excellent a companion should be so unmitigated a villain; and then he would sigh and relate some of the excellent things said that night by a man from whom, had he then known his character, he would have shrunk with horror.

They both felt like schoolboys escaped from school; for Moore, fond as he was of his wife, and truly as he esteemed her, found that their two minds were liable to rust when unsharpened by occasional contact with any brighter intellect, and the rust had grown very thick and rough over his spirit since he had last mixed with the gay people of B——.

Next morning they were up betimes, being anxious to reach town as early as possible in the day. The squatter, in order that he might the sooner begin to enjoy himself, the Commissioner for a far different reason. He was anxious to



find out whether any news of his crime had yet arrived; and if not, he wished to be on the spot when it did come, and arrange his measures accordingly; not that it was possible he could be suspected, all such fear was far from him; he had told himself detection was impossible until he believed it; but he could not help an eager expectant feeling until the whole thing had been discovered, examined into, and blown over. They had not long set out when Griffiths complained that his valise was loose, and desired Moore to ride on while he settled it.

"No," Moore answered, "a few minutes more or less won't make much difference, and I'll keep with you. I'd like to come in to town with some one, and not alone."

Thus foiled, Griffiths fumbled a few minutes with the straps of his valise, then declared he had settled it, and they rode on again for half an hour; at the end of which time the Commissioner declared the valise was loose again, and entreated his friend once more to ride on, and he would follow and overtake him. Again Moore refused to do so. They continued their way, but when they were nearing B——, Griffiths knew that with every step they took the likelihood of



meeting some one on the road increased, and it was imperative he should get rid of his dangerous burden before they reached the city. With a little manœuvring he managed to undo the straps of his valise, and let it fall clattering to the earth; then, pulling up, he exclaimed loudly about the nuisance it had been to him the whole way along, and said he must remain there and settle it firmly; but he insisted on Moore's not standing waiting for him in the sun. "Ride on quietly," he added, "and I will be after you in a few minutes."

Seeing that the job appeared likely to occupy a little time, the squatter took his friend's advice. No sooner was he out of sight than Griffiths took the dangerous parcel, and hid it in a hollow tree that after a little search he found standing some way back from the road, and in a thick, tangled scrub. Then re-strapping his luggage, he galloped after Moore, and overtook him not far from B—. Presently they entered the city. Their road led past the windows of the hotel in which Griffiths lodged, but as he intended to accompany Moore as far as the house to which he was going, he unfastened his valise, and as they passed a window of the hotel

that opened into the street, and in which several gentlemen were standing, he threw it in to them, asking Fane, who was one of them, to have it sent up to his room. The portmanteau opened as it fell—as indeed Griffiths had intended it should—and revealed his combs, brushes, and other toilet articles. The gentlemen laughed as they told a waiter to take it to his room, and Fane remarked—

“One must at least allow that he travels in light marching order; there is not an unnecessary thing there.”

Having managed matters thus far so successfully, Griffiths rode on with Moore to the friend's house where the squatter intended to stay during his sojourn in B——. On his way back the Commissioner had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Singleton, driving in Mrs. Hamilton's buggy. They had been so unfortunate as not to see him whilst riding the day before, but they had better luck on this occasion, for he stopped to speak to them, and Mrs. Hamilton immediately informed him of all the plans she had laid to meet him, and of their failure. He listened smilingly, but his private opinion was that he had had a narrow escape; for if

they had turned up that day at the same place and time as they had done the day before, he would have been unable to get rid of the notes, and those terrible proofs of guilt would have been with him when he arrived in town.

It was very evident nothing had as yet been heard of the missing waggon and escort, and after leaving the ladies and putting up his horse, Griffiths strolled round the town with Fane, telling him how he had arrived at his friend's house, the second evening after leaving B——, and how he had prevailed on the squatter to accompany him back to town on a spree!

"We must show him some fun now he is here," he continued; "he's a good-natured fellow, and expects to enjoy himself immensely, so I must try to get up something for him."

Then they devised schemes for amusing the new-comer, and lamented that they could not take him down to Sydney, that Paradise of Queensland squatters, to show him life there. There was certainly a good deal that would be amusing to a quiet man, who rarely left home even in B——, but they had done everything so often that it all seemed tame and insipid to them. They got up some plans for amuse-

ment, however, and the time passed quickly enough to everyone except Griffiths, who was watching, expecting every hour, every minute of the day, that the news of the dreadful crime that had been perpetrated would reach the town.

On the third day after his return, on coming into the hotel, after having been up to pay a visit at Prospect, he observed signs of unusual excitement among the gentlemen assembled in the coffee-room. They were all talking fast and earnestly, and the minute they perceived Griffiths he was called over, and before he had time to collect his thoughts, the whole tale of the murder, as far as it was known, was poured into his ear. It seemed that two black women—tame blacks attached to Mr. Moore's plantation—had been out looking for fowl that had strayed, accompanied by a dog; that after a time the animal manifested symptoms of uneasiness, ran off, and presently tried to attract their attention by howling and whining mournfully. The sounds were not far away, and thinking the dog had got into trouble, they proceeded in the direction in which the animal was, guided by his cries, which still continued.

As they got near, he ran to meet them, and then turning, led them on till they came to a place where they found the remains of a camp-fire, near which were lying two dead bodies, rolled in their blankets, and swelled to such a size as to be unrecognizable, and to suggest to those who were called to the spot by the women the idea of their having been killed by poison. The Government waggon that used to carry the gold to and from Green Creek stood near, but the gold-chest was broken open and empty, and the horses belonging to it were wandering in the Bush near by. The news had only just come in; everyone was in a tremendous state of excitement, and none more so than the Commissioner when he heard what had happened. He swore the murderer should be brought to justice and hanged for it, if he had to execute him with his own hands; he lamented over his two poor men, whom he had known so long, and who were always civil and good company in the long Bush journeys they had had together; and more than all he blamed himself for having left the men that night, and gone up to his friend, when his duty was to have remained with them, though, as he added

afterwards, "I don't know that would have made the matter any better, as, if they were poisoned, I should probably have shared their fate, and be rotting there now, instead of standing here well and strong among my friends."

"We're off," remarked Fane—"just got our orders to go up to the spot, and see what we can make of it. The bodies are not to be touched till we arrive."

"I'll go with you," volunteered Griffiths. "I must look into the matter, as it concerns me; besides, I should like to see that my poor fellows are properly interred after the examination. We must see what we can do to trace the money also. When do you start?"


"In half an hour," answered Fane, "and it will be hard riding; we shall only stop for a few hours on the way to bait the horses. We shall probably find the police from Green Creek on the ground before us, and then we shall know if they have discovered any traces of how it happened. We don't yet know whether they were killed by poison, or in some other way. The people who have seen the bodies think poison was the cause of death, but we are

taking Dr. Merrick with us, and he'll settle that question. You must get ready at once, if you're coming."

"Of course I'm coming," replied Griffiths. "I'll be with you immediately," and he hurried away to prepare, Fane looking after him, and thinking,

"Things look fishy for him, but he takes it wonderfully coolly. Before he came in, I shouldn't have minded betting he had some hand in the matter, from all I have seen of him before, and from the stories I hear about him, though how he could be such a fool as to steal notes would be a puzzler. Now I don't know what to think; if it's acting, it's uncommonly good acting—no strain of exaggeration about it—and his offering to come to the place staggers one rather; he'd not have courage for that, if he was guilty."

Notwithstanding which decision, Fane was not very cordial in his manner to Griffiths when that gentleman re-appeared prepared for the road; and as they rode along, he refrained from talking to him, or giving him his opinion on the case, as he would have done had his mind not been troubled by doubts.



Evening was closing in when they left B——, and rode swiftly forward to the scene of the murder. Griffiths, Dr. Merrick, and Fane rode in front together, but little conversation passed between them. Griffiths, with the sensitiveness of guilt, felt that his companions mistrusted him, and could not bring himself to talk on those trivial subjects about which alone, under the circumstances, they could have conversed freely. The men, riding two and two behind them, were busy discussing the case, and one and all looked darkly at the Commissioner in front, commenting on the obvious change in Fane's manner, and inferring from it that he too had his suspicions.

It was so strange, the persistent manner in which he had insisted on accompanying those men on the return journey, contrary to his usual habit, and at a time when the state of the country, as known to everybody, warranted no anxiety such as he had expressed. Then, again, according to his own account, he had remained with them to the close of that day, and had slept at a house not far removed from the spot where the bodies were found. The opinion of the police, as they expressed it to each other



during that dark and rapid ride, was that the men had encamped early, and that, whilst they were cooking their food, the Commissioner had contrived to put poison into it; that he had then left, and waited about in the bush until the work was done, when he re-appeared, secured or perhaps hid the notes on the spot, and then made his way to Mr. Moore's station. This was to them the only probable solution of the story. Following behind the man whom they had pre-judged and found guilty, they kept their eyes fixed on him, ready to intercept and surround him, should he show the smallest sign of an intention to escape. But he, quite ignorant of what was passing in the minds of men who, in a certain way, were still his subordinates, rode on confidently, assuring himself that Fane, who now suspected him, would, at the close of the investigation, acquit him of having had any knowledge of the affair, previous to the news coming down to B——.

Swiftly they pushed onwards over the rough road he had followed on his return journey so short awhile before; in the dim twilight, fast closing into the starlit darkness of a night in the Australian bush, he could distinguish the

place where he had stopped to hide the notes, and he almost fancied that a little way back from the road he could discover in the uncertain light the tree in which they lay hidden. It was but fancy, and yet he was afraid to turn his eyes in that direction, for fear his companions, intercepting his looks, might comprehend that the key to the mysterious business on which they were riding so fast and far, was concealed there, and that, searching, they might chance to light on the hiding-place. As they were fairly past he breathed more freely, when suddenly an exclamation from one of the men behind startled him, and made his heart beat and his head throb as they halted to demand the reason of the outcry. It was only caused by the man's horse having stumbled over some uneven ground, invisible by the faint light; and the man riding carelessly, absorbed in conversation, the animal fell, horse and rider rolling on the ground together. The tumble had taken place close to the spot where Griffiths had hidden the money, therefore it was not strange that, hearing the noise, and seeing some of the police dismounting from their horses, he should have taken it into his head they had obtained

some clue to what he imagined known only to himself. The man rose, very much shaken, for they had been riding fast, and the fall was a severe one. His horse seemed the worse for the adventure also, and after examining them, Fane told him he might return—they had enough men without him, and doubtless would find a body of police from Green Creek on the spot before them. That being settled, they pursued their way, startling many a shepherd in his lonely roadside hut from his sleep, and awaking the denizens of the paddocks, who bleated loudly and plaintively as they dashed past.

At daybreak they stopped for an hour to bait their horses, and get their own breakfast. When that was over, they set off again at a slower pace, for horseflesh will tire as well as human beings, and a tired rider makes a tired beast very often in a journey like this. Towards noon they halted again, having done three-fourths of the way, and having so completely jaded their animals that it would be impossible to go on again until the sun got lower, and the air cooler.

They cooked and ate their dinner whilst wait-

ing, and Griffiths noticed and remembered that Fane would not allow him near the place where the tea was in process of preparation. He laughed to himself at this precaution, which arose from the prevalent belief that the two men who had been murdered had been poisoned. "I wonder will Dr. Merrick find out the real state of the case," he mused, "or are the bodies too far decomposed for that." He fancied himself so safe from detection that he was inclined to be defiant to Fane, and was only restrained by the presence of the doctor, a grave gentlemanly man, before whom Griffiths felt rather ashamed of yielding to his evil inclinations. Towards four o'clock the horses were caught, and they again proceeded on their way; slowly at first, as the heat continued great, but after sunset they moved on faster, and towards midnight arrived near the spot where the fearful tragedy had been enacted. A patrol of police met them just as they were approaching a camp that had been formed near, and thither they were conducted, their arrival having been expected that evening. Sawyer the officer from Green Creek was there, as Fane had expected, and it was decided that it would be expedient

the examination of the bodies should take place the first thing next morning, as every hour of delay made the task more difficult. There were many speculations indulged in round the camp-fire, as to who had been the perpetrator of the deed, and what the object could have been. None discussed the subject more freely, or inquired into it more fully, than the Green Creek Commissioner, who said loudly again and again he should never be satisfied until he had brought the miscreants to justice ; expressing his belief that there had certainly been two, if not more, concerned in the matter. It was not at all likely, even had it been possible, that one man would have set about such an undertaking by himself ; he would require a partner to draw the two men into conversation, and attract their attention while he doctored the tea, if indeed the deaths had been caused by poison ; and if the end had been compassed by any other means, it would have been even more necessary that the murderer should have an accomplice.

When at last they had finished their supper, and even the dreadful and absorbing topic had been talked threadbare, they retired to the beds allotted to them in different tents, and the two

police-officers, Fane and Sawyer, took a stroll round to the points where they had placed patrols. Sawyer said they had formed screens or sheds to keep the sun off the bodies, it having been thought inadvisable that they should be moved, the action of the sun having already reduced them to a dreadful state of decay.

“Did you hear the Commissioner talking about this affair just now over the fire? What do you think of it?” asked Fane of his comrade.

The man he spoke to turned and looked him full in the face in the starlight; he answered not a word, speech on such a subject, and about such a man, might not be safe for young fellows not very well established in their calling; but the look had a meaning as clear as any words, and each felt that the other understood and agreed with him.

“It is a strange business,” said Sawyer after a pause, “and one the end of which it is impossible to guess. Something may turn up that may throw a light on the affair at the examination to-morrow, but I am afraid the murderer of those two men will go unpunished to his

dying day. We suspect, and have reason for doing so, but suspicion is not proof, and without that there can be no conviction, even if there is a trial."

They said no more then, but turned in; not for many hours, however, as it was late when they made their rounds, and had that conversation; the post-mortem examination was to take place very early next morning—as soon, in fact, as there was light, and before the sun got power. Just at sunrise next day they were all up, and ready for the dreadful duty that had to be performed. Griffiths accompanied the doctor and the two officers; he did not spare himself any of the details that might have been supposed to be both dangerous and trying to a man concerned as he was in the matter. He had made up his mind to do the deed, to save his name and honour from the stigma of theft; he had determined to carry through the investigation, so that he should come out, even in spite of the suspicion that had arisen against him, with his character cleared and untarnished, and therefore he bore up through all this, with a bold calm brow, just a shade defiant towards those who had dared to suspect him. He cer-

tainly possessed wonderful courage, of a peculiar kind, to hold up in such a situation ; whatever it may have cost him to maintain this firm demeanour, he never failed or broke down for a minute.

A short examination sufficed to convince the doctor they had been shot, and not poisoned, as was originally supposed—shot both of them through the heart, and from a short distance. In one case the ball had passed out on the other side, going clean through the unfortunate man's body ; in the other it had very nearly penetrated to the further side from which it had entered. This ball was extracted, and a trial was made to see if it would fit either of the two revolvers found on the men, but it did not. It was then handed over by the doctor to Fane for safe keeping, in case its evidence might be wanted again. The bodies were interred, and an inspection was made, for perhaps the fiftieth time, of the ground around the camp. Nothing further was discovered, and as they returned to camp a consultation on the way was held between Fane and Sawyer, whilst Dr. Merrick and Griffiths walked on in front.

“He's the man,” said Fane. “What do you



think we ought to do? I have no doubt in the world of his having committed the deed, but we have only circumstantial evidence, and that of the very slightest kind at present."

"I'd arrest him on suspicion," said Sawyer. "The minute we heard of it, not only I, but all my men, fixed upon him as the murderer, and I have no doubt there are plenty of others who are of my opinion."

"It's no good our doing it until we get back to the camp, and then we can tell him quietly; he might break from us here, and it wouldn't do to lose him."

Just as they had settled this, and as they were approaching the tents, a serjeant of police stepped up to them.

"They're saying up there," he said, "that the men were shot—is that true?"

"Yes, Baines, it's quite true," answered Fane; "but we haven't discovered yet who shot them."

"Everyone here thinks it's that long, black-faced Commissioner. He's been leading a fine life up at Green Creek these months past, and how he got the money that went through his hands puzzled everybody. They say he was in difficulties, and robbed the waggon to get

him out of them; the men caught him at it, and he shot them—that's it. You'll find the men up there, sir, mad to take him; they say he's so strongly suspected that they have the right to arrest him."

"I think so too," answered Sawyer; "we had just decided to do so. As soon as we get into camp we will do it; then let us get something to eat, and be off as fast as we can; I can't bear the place after what we've seen to-day."


A few minutes after, as Griffiths was walking towards the tent where he had passed the night, Fane came up, and touching him on the arm to attract his attention, said,

"I am sorry to tell you, Mr. Griffiths, that it is my duty to arrest you, on suspicion of having been concerned in the murder of those two men. Of course you can have no objection to coming with us quietly, and it would be no earthly good your resisting," he continued, as he saw a threatening expression pass over the Commissioner's face. "You can ride between the doctor and me, and once you arrive in B——, your friends will doubtless take all proper measures for your defence."

Griffiths smiled calmly. No change in his countenance betrayed him, and the police officer drew back a little, half inclined to think his suspicions unjust; but when the man he accused answered him, he felt once more he had not judged him wrongly.

"I might have expected this treatment from an upstart like you," replied Griffiths, with a savage sneer; "but when I am acquitted—for I beg you to remark it will be impossible to prove your charge—I shall then take legal proceedings against you for bringing forward such an accusation, one solely and entirely of your own fabrication, and which no one else would have dreamt of, unsupported as it is by a scrap of evidence, had not you originated it."

The expression of his face, and the malicious smile with which he said it would be impossible to prove his guilt, convinced the listener that his suspicions were correct, more than all the circumstances that had first influenced him in the matter. He beckoned Dr. Merrick over, and asked him to send up Sawyer, who was talking with some Green Creek men at a little distance; and, on Sawyer's approach, he begged him to keep near himself and the prisoner, until



they resigned their charge of him in B——.

An hour after they were on their way thither, Griffiths still bearing up, and maintaining his usual cheerful good-humour, in a way that astonished his captors. They could not understand guilt presenting so much the appearance of innocence, though it is to be questioned whether the innocent taken by surprise, when such a charge is brought against them, ever present so cool and collected a bearing as the guilty, who should be shame-stricken and terrified at finding themselves discovered. Notwithstanding his outward calmness, many a time it entered into his mind to turn his horse's head to the bush, and flee for his life; and he most certainly would have done so, but that he thought many of those present were better mounted than himself, and that while he should fail of escaping, he should at once stamp himself as guilty by the attempt.

All that day they travelled, a dull, uncongenial party, for though, to all except Fane, Griffiths kept up the semblance of friendliness, yet it was evident all avoided and mistrusted him as much as did the police-officer; and they could not even converse freely amongst themselves

whilst he was listening, because, as may be supposed, the subject that most occupied their thoughts and minds was the great event in which they were concerned, and the chief actor in which, as they supposed, was among them.

Arrived in B——, he was at once sent to the police-station, though several of his friends tried to obtain bail for him. The police were of opinion it was a case in which bail could not be taken, and until it had been heard before a magistrate, they would not grant it.

“Leave them alone,” said Griffiths to his friends. “I intend to make them pay for it as soon as I get out ; it won’t do me any harm staying here for a night or so.”

“The inquiry will be held to-morrow, so you needn’t be afraid of remaining here much longer,” answered his friend Mr. Joyce, who was one of the first to come and see him, and who had offered bail for a large amount. When he went home to his family, Mr. Joyce told them what had happened, and how cheerful Griffiths was, quite confident that all would come right. “It is a shame those rascally police having the power to take a man like that on suspicion ; and though they talk of having a

strong case against him, I can't think what it can be, unless they know more than they choose to tell."

"Of course he didn't do it—he couldn't have done it," said Mrs. Hamilton, looking up quietly from some embroidery. "I always knew he was a bad lot, and I think him so still, but he is a gentleman, and that was quite too ungentlemanly a thing to do. No, I am sure the Commissioner is innocent; but I won't call him my Commissioner any more till it is set straight. If he is remanded for trial to-morrow, when will it come off?"

"Sophy, you really are too heartless," said her father. "This is a man you profess to like, and you talk as quietly about his being tried for murder as if you were asking when he was going to have his dinner. I hope the matter will never go as far as that, and that he'll be let out to-morrow. Your cousin Clara, who hardly knows the man, has far more heart than you, and is really sorry for him."

Mrs. Hamilton glanced at her cousin, and saw, to her surprise, that she was indeed very pale, and her large sad eyes looked sadder than usual as she glanced up at her uncle.

"It is dreadful," she said; and was again silent, thinking that she feared—oh! so greatly, there might be some grain of truth in this report, that might suffice to bring danger and difficulty on the accused. It was possible he might in some remote way have been connected with it, for it seemed to her now that she knew him as he was, being unblinded by the glamour of love, that there was something daring, desperate, even fiendish in his nature, that would not prevent his shrinking from any crime, however dreadful it might be. But she did not really suspect him of having been an actor in the tragedy—that was too terrible to think of. In some other, and more round-about way, she could believe him guilty, could believe that he had perhaps discovered the deed before the perpetrators had escaped, and had shared the spoils. Of the more terrible and devilish part, real action in the matter, she could not think him capable. If it should turn out that he should be committed for trial, she would go and see him in prison, even if she should have to tell her uncle that she had known him in former days. She would do this; and having determined on doing so, she knew that no one

could dissuade her, or prevent her from carrying out her project.

Next day the Court-house, where the inquiry was to be held, was crowded. Everybody in B—— who could spare time was there; and when the proceedings began, the silence was intense. Griffiths, who did not seem in the least disturbed or put out, scowled on Fane when he made his charges, and then nodded with a good-humoured, cheerful smile to those friends whom he recognised in the crowd.

The circumstances which had induced the police to arrest him were briefly these:—He had for a long time been suspected by them of appropriating Crown moneys to his own use. Their reasons for thinking so were, that it was well known he lived far beyond his means, and yet had no debts; added to which his losses at gaming-tables were, by all accounts, enormous; and many witnesses could be brought forward to prove this. When he lost, he generally paid in raw gold—a very convenient method, as it could be subtracted from the Government coffers without being traced. So much for the suspicions about his pecuniary matters—they then



passed on to the second class of reasons. He had insisted on accompanying this particular escort, against their wishes, as they did not see any necessity for it, and themselves mistrusted him. There were witnesses also to prove this. He had alleged that the country was unsettled, and that the sum of money returning was larger than might safely be entrusted to the care of two men; whereas it was known to everyone that the country had never been more free of robbers or bushrangers than at the present moment; and it was easy to prove that far larger sums had often travelled with as little protection in more troublesome times.

He, however, persisted in his intention of accompanying them, and had stated that he would proceed no further with them than to Mr. Moore's station, where, according to his own account, he had left them before they had lighted their camp-fire. It was evident the murder could not have taken place until after that had been done, for the condition in which one of the bodies had been found clearly proved that the man, on being shot, had fallen into the fire, and had been dragged out afterwards by the murderer. The black trackers had found

the path Griffiths had pursued to reach Mr. Mr. Moore's station, and had not found any traces of a horse returning; but there were some tracks discovered near the camp, which they asserted had been caused by a person approaching it slowly and cautiously; whoever had made them, had certainly paused here and there behind trees for a considerable space of time, and these traces were on the side of the camp nearest the station. The marks were only to be distinguished here and there, for though, as soon as ever the discovery was made, the blacks had been employed to look for any clue or indication of the murderer that might be found, still two days had elapsed before anything had been known about it.

Mr. Moore, on being examined, could only depose that Mr. Griffiths had retired early, and begged that no one might disturb him—a fact that, in prejudiced minds, heightened the feeling against him. He appeared to have slept late, and was as cheerful and pleasant as usual next morning, the only oddity Mr. Moore had observed about him being his anxiety about the manner in which his valise was strapped on, an anxiety afterwards fully justified, as the second

day of their journey it proved very troublesome, constantly requiring to be settled, and at last falling off bodily, when Griffiths got down to settle it, and Moore at his request rode on. As soon as they arrived at the town, Griffiths had thrown his troublesome luggage in at the hotel window, to get rid the more quickly of such an unmanageable article. Mr. Moore considered that the difficulties about his valise were real, not feigned, and he thought his friend injured and insulted by the suspicions the police had excited against him.

The bullet that had been extracted from one of the dead men was next produced in court, and fitted exactly Griffiths's revolver, which had also been procured for the occasion. At this juncture the prisoner for the first time evinced any appearance of feeling, for when he saw what was taking place, he drew himself up and requested permission to make an observation. He was allowed to do so, but warned that any admission he might make would be used against himself.

To this he replied that he only objected to the fact of the ball fitting his revolver being made use of against him, because so many

people used the same make of revolver that in all probability there were twenty or thirty others in court that it would fit equally well.

This was a self-evident truth, and his friends thought he had materially strengthened his case thereby; but those who looked on him with distrust—and, strange to say, they were in the majority—regarded it as a sharp hit that proved nothing.

It was very curious how, on what was only very slight circumstantial evidence, such a prevailing conviction of this man's guilt had sprung up. Only among the small circle of his intimate friends was his innocence believed in; and in that country at that time such a conviction was a much more serious matter than it would have been elsewhere. Though Judge Lynch did not reign supreme in the colony, as he had often done in America, still the suddenness and severity of punishment reminded men often of the decrees of that stern mob-law-giver.

Thus Griffiths and his friends were soon aware that popular feeling ran so high, and the opinion of some of the magistrates conducting the inquiry was so strongly against him, that he would certainly be committed for trial at the

next assizes, which were now fast approaching; being once committed, he could only hope to get off through very strenuous exertions on the part of his friends.

The way people reasoned was this: the men had been shot very shortly after he had left them, while he was still in their neighbourhood. He had persisted in accompanying them, though several people had tried to dissuade him, urging what was manifestly a false excuse for this anxiety; as far as had been discovered, no bushrangers, or people of any sort, had come near the place where the men met their death, from the time the murder occurred until it was discovered, except one individual, traces of whom the blacks asserted they had found, and who was declared by popular prejudice to be the Commissioner, it being also reported that he had good reason for wishing to obtain possession of the money.

The numbers of the notes were published, and measures taken for stopping them, wherever they might be presented. Griffiths, knowing how high the feeling ran against him, smiled grimly when he reflected that if any of the notes were taken they would be with the China-

men ; and he was well aware popular prejudice was so strong against that people that not only would any accusation of him on their part have little weight, but that they would be tried, condemned, and executed almost before they had time to make any charge against him.

The innocent would suffer for the guilty, no doubt ; after all, what were a few Chinamen, more or less ? Not of much account at any time to him, they were less than dust in the balance against his safety. Thus thinking, he calmly awaited the moment when the money should be discovered in their possession.

The Assizes approached, and still no traces came to sight of the missing notes. Day after day rolled by, and as the time drew near, and everybody felt that he was very likely to be condemned on this charge, his friends consulted long and anxiously together how they might deliver him. His intimates were so convinced he could have had nothing to do with it, that, if he was convicted and executed, nothing short of a miracle would ever induce them to believe he was not a martyr to the vengeful feeling of the populace, who were determined to have blood shed to avenge the fate of their

comrades, and who had fixed on him for a victim. The only way in which, as it seemed, they could possibly befriend him, was to wait until after the trial, and then, if it went against him, apply for a free pardon to the Governor. It was not a satisfactory way of obtaining their object, but it was the only one remaining to them. This plan was much talked over among them, and one day, after they had been discussing it, Mr. Joyce, on his return home, mentioned it to his wife and niece, Mrs. Hamilton not being with them at that time. On hearing the scheme, Clara looked up with a very white face.

"You don't mean," she said, "that it is likely he will be found guilty? I could not believe it of him."

"Of course not," answered her uncle—"no one who knew him would; and yet popular feeling runs very high against him, and the police are so keen about raking up suspicious circumstances, that it is very likely he will be condemned. They are determined to prove him the murderer, if possible, to justify themselves for having taken him up so immediately, before any circumstances that would have excused such a course were brought to light."

"Can people go and see him?" asked Miss Singleton, after a minute's pause. "He is in goal, I know, but how do you pay him visits?"

Mr. Joyce laughed.

"Oh! that's easy enough; there are certain days and hours when anyone may see prisoners, but I can go in whenever I like, being an ex-officio, and anyone who wishes to go in at a time when the gaol is not usually open, can obtain admittance by getting an order from a governor. Why do you want to know all this?—are you thinking of paying him a visit? I did not know you were one of his admirers."

He spoke laughingly, treating his suggestion as a joke; but his astonishment was great when she answered seriously—

"Indeed I do want to go, uncle, very much indeed. I don't know that I am what you call one of his admirers—indeed, I don't approve of him in many ways—but I don't believe he did this thing, and I should like to let him see that I don't. I suppose I ought to have told you all before that I knew Mr. Griffiths some years ago in England. He was in my uncle's regiment, and my uncle took a very great interest in him, from having known his family. I know,



if he was here, he would go and see him in prison, and I think he would be pleased I should do so, as he is not here to do it himself. It would show that his old friends had not deserted him, and believed in his innocence."

Mr. Joyce mused awhile, then said,

"It is a very extraordinary idea to take into your head. Couldn't you write and express your sympathy by letter? The course you wish to pursue, though doubtless it would be pleasant to the young man's feelings, would lay you open to any number of ill-natured remarks, and I really cannot allow you to place yourself in the power of all the gossips in the colony."

"In this matter," answered Clara firmly, "I do not care in the slightest degree what gossip may say of me. My motive is innocent, and I think right. I am sure my uncle William would allow me to act as I please, and if you will not give me your help to go privately, I will go on one of the public days. I do not wish," she continued, "to be disobedient or disrespectful to you, uncle, but you must allow that I am old enough to judge for myself, and in this case I insist on following my own judgment."

Mr. Joyce looked at his niece's calm, resolute face, and said,

"I do believe you have more sense than Sophy, and that is what so astonishes me about this request of yours. If it had been she who had taken so mad a scheme into her head, I should not have been surprised ; but I gave you credit for knowing the world better, and understanding more clearly what was consistent with your dignity as a woman."

Clara raised her head as he finished speaking, and her flashing eyes betrayed that she was moved in what was for her a very unusual manner.

"How like that is to a man's views of women!" she cried, forgetting for once the gentle, immovable calm that was her distinguishing characteristic. "If we keep ourselves in the stereotyped groove man's would-be wisdom has marked out for us, and become the meek, submissive, patient, unreasoning beings which is his ideal type of female character, then the cry is raised that we are mindless—almost soulless creatures, not capable of understanding reason, and in addressing whom man feels it beneath him to employ reasonable argu-

ment; believed to be frivolous whenever we get the opportunity of being gay, and by most men accused of being heartless also. But when driven by necessity or any arrangement of circumstances to think and act for ourselves, to overstep in some way, no matter how laudable, the boundary line that man has laid down to control and restrain us, then we are told that we are unfeminine, have become lost to a sense of self-respect, or, as you said just now, forgetful of our dignity as women. I hold that a woman's greatest dignity is to be true to herself and others—indeed, one is the sequence of the other; and, knowing this man as I do, being aware of many things concerning him known by none here, I hold it my duty to go and have some conversation with him, about matters that are neither known by, nor do they concern, anyone in the colony. So now, uncle, forgive me if I have spoken hastily, but the narrow-minded cant that one hears men talk about women, drives me beyond myself sometimes, though generally, when it does not threaten to interfere with what I consider right, I prefer to treat it with the contempt it merits.”

“I don't mind your speaking to me in that

way, in the least," replied her uncle; "but I must remark that, like those of all women, your arguments are false and ill-chosen."

She laughed a little this time as she answered—

"You're not clear in your terms, uncle; and I have often remarked that the men who refuse to argue with women are those who, from an insufficient perception of the meaning and force of the words they use, are quite incapable of conducting an argument. In this instance that has just occurred, my hasty speech was a series of assertions, and no argument at all, as I did not attempt to refute your charge."

Her uncle shrugged his shoulders. He was a good-natured, kind-hearted man, but his niece had brought a true bill against him; he was incapable of conducting an argument with the closeness, decision, and keen perception of telling points necessary for such amusement; and though, of course, his pride as a man would not allow him to confess that he could be in any way inferior to a woman, still he had an uncomfortable conviction that he had been morally and mentally sat upon, and he collapsed in consequence.

"I suppose you will go, if you choose—'a wilful woman will have her way,' as the proverb says. As I can't prevent you, I'll do my best to help you; I'll take you there some day, and will talk to the governor if you wish for a private interview, as I suppose you do, if the subjects you intend to speak about are not known to any of us here."

"Thanks, uncle," she answered, smiling at him brightly; "I won't trouble you, however, just yet; it all depends on how matters go on with him at the trial whether I want to see him or not. If he is liberated, I shall be able to say what I want to him here some other time; and, as you object to my going to the jail, I won't go there, if I can help it. As regards your proverb, the true version of it, if I remember correctly, is, 'A wilful *man* will have his way.' There was a slight perversion in your edition, which, I suppose, to the male mind, was not worth mentioning."

Her uncle laughed; he was fond of his niece, and often indulged in wordy wars with her, always exhibiting the most perfect good-humour, though most frequently the worsted party.


"Admit," he said, "that it was fair to alter that, for you can be wilful when you please; and though I don't know that you are more so than many men of my acquaintance, yet it strikes one more, as you never assert yourself unless you are determined on carrying through your object; and as you always succeed, if you are resolved to do so, one can record no case where your will has failed you. While many men that I know, who are just as determined in great things, often make a stand at small matters, and afterwards give in, so that they leave an impression of failure and weakness of will, with which they certainly have no right to be charged."

"I give in to the accusation of being wilful, now that I have carried my point," answered Clara; "and as soon as I know the result of the trial I will tell you what I am going to do."

## CHAPTER XI.

TIME rolled heavily away to the prisoner, though his friends were very constant in their visits to him, and though he had every luxury and indulgence that could be obtained for him. From his visitors he learnt that, though no new evidence had turned up, the conviction of his guilt strengthened. They did not tell him this in so many words—it would have been hardly pleasant intelligence to the man who was waiting to be tried on such a charge, and with such a doom attendant on his conviction, but he could see it in their faces and manner when he questioned them on the subject; and though he knew they had some project on foot for getting him off, if the worst came to the worst, still it was evident they apprehended the most undesirable termination to the trial.

When they left he would think the matter over, and knowing what he knew, would wonder what would happen if a verdict of guilty was returned—whether his friends' efforts would fail, and he, being condemned to death, should have to submit to the execution of the sentence of the law. It was so impossible for him to realise that matters would reach that crisis, that whenever he thought it over, he stopped short as he arrived at the sentence. He might be sentenced, that he knew was likely, but further than that things would not proceed—there the exertions of those labouring in his behalf would save him. But if the worst happened, he would not die the death of a common felon, with hundreds of curious eyes watching his agony. He would die as he had lived, self-contained and self-willed, not owning the power or control of any influence but that of his own mind. He had the means of disappointing the curiosity of the idle crowd, of avoiding the vigilance of his jailers, of baffling the decrees of justice. The little phial which he had some time before secreted about his person, when apprehensive of such a termination to his speculations, was still with him; he had






managed to keep it concealed until now, and the only difficulty that presented itself was whether he should be able to secrete it, when searched before being removed to the condemned cell. If he could manage to do so, his way of escape was at all times open.

Provided with this, Griffiths felt he could await the issue of the trial calmly. He had no belief in the hereafter, a firm conviction in the existence of which exerts such a powerful influence over both good and evil—the comfort of the one, the terror of the other ; therefore the sole idea the execution of the law presented to him was that of degradation, and perhaps regret for the loss of pleasure in this life ; but apart from the humiliation, the mere prospect of death did not affect him much. Total annihilation, a dreamless sleep, from which there was no waking—this was the light in which the “ King of Terrors ” appeared to him.

The police, meanwhile, were busy pursuing their inquiries everywhere, leaving no stone unturned to discover more and stronger evidence. They had a conviction, amounting to a moral certainty, that their prisoner had done the deed ; but though he might possibly be found



guilty, unless they had some proof to bring forth, they knew that many of the respectable portion of the community would always in future look upon them with distrust, and assert that they had overstepped their duty. As yet all their diligence had been rewarded by no discovery, and the day of the trial drew near.

It came at last. There had been one or two cases on before his; but as they came on in alphabetical order, he was rather high up the list, and it was still early in the day when he was called. The court was crowded, and on the prisoner's appearance the feeling about him was plainly shown by the storm of hisses and groans that arose from the multitude thronging the courthouse. As he cast his eyes around, and saw how every face met his glance with a scowl, he experienced for the first time a sensation of fear. These men were determined he should be condemned, and his friends, though powerful, were few in number. He glanced at the judge, and felt as if even he was against him, while a very large number of the jurors were, he knew, men who advocated putting down crime at any price, and who would not be at all averse to sacrificing him, even on insufficient evidence,

if thereby they thought they could promote order in the country. He had the best possible counsel employed on his side, and the defence he sought to prove was an alibi. He was in Mr. Moore's house at the time the murder had been committed—probably asleep, perfectly unconscious of the dreadful crime that was then being perpetrated, and which it had since been attempted to fasten upon him.

It is true the counsel for the prosecution on behalf of the Crown pointed out that though he might be supposed to be asleep at Mr. Moore's, there was nothing to prevent his having gone to the camp to commit the deed of which he was accused; and he went on to show that from various circumstances this was not only possible but probable, going over all the evidence, and calling witnesses to prove the truth of what was brought forward. His speech was a powerful one, and deepened the impression on the minds of the listeners that the man in the dock before them was guilty; while his friends saw with concern that he would most surely be convicted.

The trial was not over that evening—the counsel for the defence had yet to address the

court; but everyone felt that, unless the true culprit was discovered next day, it was all up with Griffiths. He knew it too; and though his outward calmness did not forsake him, a horrible pang of fear and dread seized him at the thought of leaving this life he had found so pleasant, and passing from it into utter darkness—he knew not what. Could it be that he was wrong, and others right about that?—that death was not the end of being; that there was an eternal happiness, or a depth of woe, reserved for all who crossed the threshold, from the light and warmth of this life, into the darkness beyond. He shuddered at the thought, and turned from it impatiently—it was no time for doubts of this sort to arise and torment him—sceptic he had lived, sceptic he would die; and pass away into the utter oblivion and nonentity represented to him by the word death.

Mr. Joyce, when he went home that evening, related to his wife, Clara, and Mrs. Hamilton, who was again with them, what had happened.

“He is certain to be condemned to-morrow, poor fellow. Appearances are desperately against him; for if he didn’t do it, we can find no clue to anyone who did; and yet the belief

that he could be the perpetrator of such a deed is preposterous. We'll be able to get him off, I am sure; still the stigma will cling to him through life, and do him a great deal of mischief, I am afraid."

Clara looked up from her work, white and resolute.

"When you are going in to-morrow morning, uncle, you must drive me in. Let us start very early, and I can see him before he has to go to court. He doesn't go in till ten. If I could be there between seven and eight, I should not be in the way if anyone else wanted to see him before he had to leave."

"I don't like your going," answered her uncle; "but as I know you will do it whether I allow you or not, I'll go with you. Only take my advice, and wait till next day. The jury will give their verdict some time to-morrow, after which we will draw up our petition, and present it. Of course he will be uneasy and anxious while in that state of uncertainty; and if you will go to the prison, it would be a kindness to go then, and try to divert him."

"Very well," Clara replied, "I'll wait if you think it better; but no matter what the decision

is, whether your petition is likely to be successful or not, I go then."

"My dear Clara!" exclaimed Sophy Hamilton, "you don't mean to say you are going to see the Commissioner at the prison? I wonder papa and mamma allow you—it is most improper. I never should have thought you would have permitted your liking for a man to carry you as far as that; besides, I did not know you cared for him—you never professed to do so."

"I don't care for him in the way you mean," answered Clara; "but I have something to say to him which is important to him and others, though not to me. I knew him years ago, when he was in my uncle's regiment; I have no fear that he will misunderstand the object of my visit."

"You knew him before!" cried Sophy. "Well, I must say you are sly, deceitful people, both of you. I don't so much wonder at your not having mentioned it, you are always so close; but I am surprised at him—he told me he had not met you before. However, that doesn't make it a bit better, your going to see him; and I wonder mamma allows it. You ought to


forbid her," she added, turning to her mother.

"Let your cousin do as she likes," Mrs. Joyce answered; "it's not what I'd do myself—not for the best man that ever wore shoe-leather; but if she chooses to do it, I can't prevent her."

Sophy Hamilton tossed her head, sniffed, looked at Clara in a scornful manner, and said she never did and never could understand English girls, they were so dreadfully prudish and particular in innocent matters; and then, when you had begun to think them so discreet that nothing could rouse them out of their propriety of demeanour, suddenly they would do something so extraordinarily bold and forward that it fairly took away the breath of a gay young colonial like herself.

Clara laughed, and the matter dropped; but she alone could tell how fast her heart beat, and how nervous she felt all next day, waiting to hear what the verdict would be, and what prospect there was of his ultimate release.

Next morning the trial continued. Griffiths' counsel made an able and eloquent speech, in which he feelingly depicted the torment of mind to which his unoffending client must be a prey while remaining under the stigma of such



a fearful crime. But though his speech was good and eloquent, everyone could not but feel his case was weak; he could only praise his client's character, and affirm he was at Mr. Moore's when the crime was committed; even that was not capable of proof, for the opposite side had already demonstrated that he had retired to rest early; and from the fact of the men having been enveloped in their blankets, and asleep, it was probably rather late in the night when the murder was perpetrated—at any rate, later than nine o'clock, at which hour Griffiths had retired to rest, and had not been seen again by anyone until the next morning.

Seeing how matters were going, Griffiths' friends had drawn up their petition, and whilst the counsel was delivering his address they went out and signed it. Most of the influential inhabitants appended their names, and there were no less than sixteen magistrates among the number. When they returned to the court they found the business had so far progressed that the jury were just about to retire and consider their verdict. Before they could leave, however, a slip of paper was passed up to the counsel for the prosecu-



tion, who glanced over it rapidly, and then, addressing the judge, informed him that an important piece of evidence had just been discovered, and he begged that the jury would resume their seats until he had brought it forward. Intense excitement now prevailed throughout the court; important evidence brought to light at the eleventh hour is always pretty sure to create a sensation, but in this instance there was something in the counsel's look and manner that convinced everyone the evidence was conclusive, and that he considered the case terminated, and the verdict given. Griffiths saw it too, and waited with a painful, devouring anxiety, to know what this could be that had so suddenly risen up against him. Could it be that the notes had been discovered? That was the only thing he could think of that would criminate him. When he saw a small parcel handed to the barrister he felt relieved, as he knew they made a much larger bundle than that. Presently there was a stir in court, and then three Chinamen, marshalled by police, made their way up to the witness-box, in which they were placed, and the counsel, drawing himself up, and looking at them searchingly,

began to speak, glancing for one minute at the prisoner, who still preserved his calmness, but whose face had assumed an extraordinary ashy grey tint when he saw the Chinamen enter the court. The usual formalities were gone through, and then the barrister, addressing the judge, asked him if he would take the trouble to read over the list of notes that had been stopped by the bank as being in the parcel sent to Green Creek; then, opening the parcel before him, he produced several notes, the numbers on which he read out, and the corresponding number to which was checked off on the paper the judge held in his hand.

“Plainly,” he continued, “these notes are some of those sent by the bank to Green Creek. One of them was presented for change three days ago in Green Creek by the Chinaman calling himself Sing Sing. It was at once stopped, and he was arrested. On finding that there was something wrong in the matter, he asserted that the note, and some others, had been given to him by the Commissioner, in exchange for gold which they had paid him, and he declared that two of his companions had notes, also given them by Mr. Griffiths. They were at once ar-

rested, and they all produced their money, which you see here, and which is undeniably some of the Green Creek parcel. They continue to maintain that it was given to them by the Commissioner, and I am inclined to believe the truth of their statement."

Here the counsel on the other side requested permission to speak, and it being granted, said he hoped his learned brother did not think of taking the testimony of three Chinamen against the life of a white man of such repute and standing as Mr. Griffiths. What more likely than that they had been the perpetrators of the deed, and seeing that he was being tried for it, endeavoured to put it off upon him. He could see, he added, looking round the court, that was the opinion of every unprejudiced person there; in truth, since the introduction of the Chinamen, it was evident popular feeling had changed, and they, by public opinion, were relegated to the position Griffiths had occupied before they appeared.

The Crown counsel glanced at the faces before him, that expressed plainly the change of feeling, and smiled quietly as he continued—


"I would willingly, my lord, and gentlemen

of the jury, concur in the opinion that I see has been arrived at by my learned brother, and most of those here present, but for one circumstance."—Then he leaned forward, holding a note in his hand, which he tapped smartly with his pencil, as he said—"Here, my lord, and gentlemen of the jury, is the evidence I deem conclusive, and on which I claim a conviction. You will observe, my lord, the name of one of the Chinamen is written on the back of this note, and—it is in the prisoner's handwriting."

He glanced around the Court as he finished, whilst handing the note up to the judge, who examined it, and asked if there was anyone present sufficiently well acquainted with the prisoner's handwriting to identify it. Several people did so, and in a short time both that and the names on the other notes were all proved to have been written by Griffiths. The sensation produced by this discovery was intense; the Chinamen's tale, which, when they were first examined, produced no impression, was now recognised as truth, and even the warmest partisans of the ex-Commissioner were convinced of his guilt. After this it took the jury a very little consultation to return a ver-

dict of guilty, and the judge, in a short and impressive speech, pronounced the sentence of the law. He was to be hanged the next day but one after, and as the words fell slowly one by one on his ears, he knew that he had nothing to expect from the friends who had stood by him so long; they had all fallen away on hearing the sentence which pronounced him guilty.

He bore up wonderfully, however, and left the Court still calm and unmoved as when he had hoped to escape conviction. The crowd around hissed and groaned, only a strong force of police prevented their tearing him in pieces. He would not before them show any signs of terror or feeling; but, in the solitude of the condemned cell to which he had been removed, he began in his loneliness to realise the awful doom before him. He felt so strong and active, so full of life and vigour, that he could not conceive what the total annihilation he had believed in could be like. That the well-knit, powerful limbs could grow weak and insensible, that the heart could cease to beat, and the eyelids close on the world so suddenly for ever, was almost more than he could comprehend with regard to himself, though he had seen



death come suddenly and swiftly—had dealt it himself before now. And the busy mind that had planned and wrought for him, how was it to be put at rest? It was not part of his body, he knew and could feel. Did the death of the body destroy it also, or did it live to suffer or enjoy, as most people held? That was too terrible a thought, for he had no hope but of one future—if future for the soul there must be. How these thoughts surged up in endless succession over his brain!—he could not lay them or get rid of them if he would; all through the long hours of the night they kept him company, and when morning broke he was haggard and weary, but still wakeful.


It was yet early when the jailer entered and informed him that a lady wished to see him; he almost started as he heard that, and though he had never thought of his wife till then, her image suddenly rushed upon his mind, and he remembered that she had been left alone by him in a strange land, to live a pure or a sinful life, as the uprightness of her character or the force of circumstances might dictate, with none to protect or look after her. But the vision vanished as the door opened and a woman

entered, her face closely muffled in a thick veil, but her figure betraying her identity to eyes that had often watched her with admiration, nearly approaching to love.

When the door closed behind her, she removed her veil and spoke :

“You are surprised to see me here—I can read it in your face ; but I made my uncle bring me, because it was necessary I should see you, and ask you about your wife. Have you not some message—something to tell me for her ? Do you know where she lives ? I might send for her.”

“There would not be time,” he answered, low and hoarsely ; “besides, I behaved badly to her, and I fear that now she cannot care for me. It would only pain her to see me here—she is best where she is. I have nothing to leave her—a felon has no property, but I would ask you to look for her. She is in Melbourne, I believe, if she has not returned home ; if you find her tell her I am dead, and let her know I repented my conduct to her, and had I to live my life over again, would, at least, treat her differently. Now that I stand on the brink of this world, looking over into nonentity, I see how wrong



my actions have been from the beginning—what an evil use I have made of a life that might have been more pleasant and honourable. I have wronged everyone I came across ; you have suffered by me as well as others ; but I have one excuse to plead you are not aware of. I was wronged from my earliest years, and by those who should have been my truest friends ; since then I have been an Ishmael, my hand against every man, and, as a natural consequence, many turned their hand against me—though not as many as I deserved, I grant.”

He paused, and Clara remained silent and hesitating. He had not told her much of the state of affairs between him and his wife, and yet she felt convinced he had been to blame, and that his petition for forgiveness would have more meaning in the ears of his deserted wife than it had in hers. A great longing to try to speak words of warning and advice took possession of her ; she feared he had no hope after death, that even repentance of his crime, if he did repent, would be of little avail to him, as long as he was ignorant of the way of salvation. She tried to say some words to him on this subject, but he interrupted her hurriedly:



"I believe nothing of all that," he said; "it is a mere fable, an old wife's tale; I have all my life lived without faith in a hereafter, I will not cringe to the dread of it now, when I stand on the brink of an unknown darkness. It is true that I committed the crime of which I am accused; I have written out my confession," laying his hand on a paper as he spoke; "I have told them where to find the lost notes, and now I have finished with the world. I would willingly have lived longer; I have had a pleasant time of it, but I do not regret the deed I committed; it was well planned, and, but for one stupid oversight, well executed. I blame myself for having failed in that point, but if I were in the same circumstances again, I should act as I have done, with that one exception."

Clara shuddered as she listened; it was fearful to hear such sentiments from lips that by the next midday would be cold in death; but before she could say anything the turnkey announced that her time was up, and saying "farewell" with a choked voice she hurried away.

"Well, so you have seen your old friend," sneered Sophy Hamilton when she returned. "I wonder you had the courage to go into the



cell with a murderer. Was he glad to see you?"

Clara turned away, she was upset by what she had gone through, and her cousin's frivolity sickened her. Could it be possible that this girl had ever professed to love the man of whom she now spoke thus?


"Sophy, my dear," here interrupted her mother, "it would be well that you should leave the town till after the execution; having been so near marrying him, it would be seemly that you should give at least this indication of feeling."

"Indeed, mamma, I don't see it at all," replied her daughter. "Fancy my feeling sorrow for a murderer! I have every reason to be joyful that I escaped him; besides, I am going to a dance at the Forsyths' to-morrow evening, and I have no idea of losing my fun for his sake. It's a great nuisance we ever knew him."

Clara turned and went away, leaving Mrs. Joyce to continue her remonstrance, and thinking how sad a fate it was to leave one's name and character in the power of a woman such as her cousin.


Meanwhile Griffiths, left alone in his cell, began to think that the time had come

when the poison he had secreted about him would be of service. It was time that he should take it, and escape out of the power of the avenger ; yet as he raised the phial to his lips, he paused and thought of the strange wonderful change that was about to take place in him. All the daily actions of life were done with for ever, even the busy brain was to be stilled, and the evil that he had done could be repented of no more. He felt an intense longing to know what had become of the wife he had loved for so brief a space, and so cruelly deserted ; he would fain have been with her as of old, and have craved forgiveness for his sins towards her, a forgiveness he knew he would not ask in vain. Now she would never know how entirely he had repented of his conduct to her, and that reflection added another pang to the grief he felt for his desertion of her. But she, far away in the southern city, was all unconscious of his regret ; and if she thought of him at all, still believed him unfaithful and cruel as ever—being only undeceived when Clara Singleton sought and found her months afterwards, and delivered to her the repentant message of the doomed man.



He did not reproach himself for the manner in which he had abused Mrs. Grant's credulity; he had never cared for her, and 'in truth there was little real repentance in his heart for all the evil deeds of his youth; only the beauty of his young wife as it rose before his imagination touched him, and he thought, were she with him, his last hours would not be so lonely and desolate as they were. What was it that had set him so wrong in the world? He had always excused himself by thinking it was the blow his pride had received in early youth, the total destruction of his faith in his parents, whom until then he had revered; but was it so in truth? was the sin visited on the child, till he was hemmed in and unable to help himself? In the clearer light that dawned on him now, when he had nothing more to hope from life, he began to perceive that it was not so; that he had been specially favoured in being able to hide the stain attached to him; that the trial might have been made a blessing, by teaching him to avoid the sins that had brought so much misery on his parents. But he had not been willing to see it in this light, until too late.

In the morning, when the jailer came to warn



him that he must prepare for the last moments of his life, he was lying stiff and dead, the bottle of poison fast clenched in his cold hand. He was gone—gone to the future he had disbelieved in and yet dreaded—gone, leaving none behind to mourn a life so soon cut short, an early promise of good things so irretrievably blighted. It was all over, and nothing remained behind but the evil reputation he had gained, the sad annals of a warped life.

THE END.

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